MOBILIZING GYPSY CHURCH LEADERS FOR INITIATING INTENTIONAL DISCIPLE-MAKING EFFORTS IN THEIR LOCAL FAITH COMMUNITIES

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To Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and its faculty.
Thank you for giving me the privilege to study, grow, and be prepared
for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.
This has been one fascinating journey
and an absolute honor to be the first Bulgarian to enroll and graduate!

It did not matter how small the group was to start with

so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce.

-Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis-project demonstrates the importance of formal training of Gypsy church leaders for initiating intentional and ever-multiplying disciple-making efforts for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in Bulgaria. It presents in detail a course preparation, recruitment of participants, course materials, the teaching and interactions during a four-week study on the foundation for and the principles of disciple-making from the ministry of Jesus and the early church. As a result of the training, the course graduates provided a highly positive feedback on the knowledge they gained and on their readiness to engage men and women in disciple-making in their local churches.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

A Vision To Contemplate

To miss the forest for the trees is often a challenge in theology, biblical studies, and ministry. The book of Revelation is undoubtedly a vivid case of this. It is one of the portions of Scripture that draws a lot of interest and is highly thought-provoking. However, in the Christian community, it is also an example of a great paradox. Many Christ-followers are obsessed with the content of Revelation while somehow ignoring its *grand vision* of eternity. For many, it seems too easy to get buried in the details of the end times and the interpretation of mysterious beings, events and numbers but miss the golden thread of the majesty of God's presence and the eternal joyous experience of God's people. In search of explanation for enigmatic depictions of the heavenly realm, one can miss what is obvious and clear, namely the throne scenes of Revelation.[1] Only few other passages of Scripture offer to the reader such an elevated picture of human existence and eternal blessedness in God's presence. Contemplating the eternal realities in anticipation of Christ's return can not only comfort and reassure the reader of Revelation[2] but it can also inspire and motivate the global and the local church to pursue their calling and to become completely sold out to the purposes of God and the advancement of God's kingdom.

In Revelation 7:9, John writes: "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before

[1] One of the most highly recommended studies on the book of Revelation is by Robert E. Coleman who explores in detail the throne scenes of God and draws special attention to this golden thread in Revelation. See Robert E. Coleman, *Singing With The Angels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1980).

[2] Today's readers of the book of Revelation would benefit tremendously if they bear in mind the circumstances of the original readers of John's writings, to whom persecution and martyrdom for their Christian faith were a present reality. John's Revelation must have reassured them that the tribulations they were going through were not the end of the story and that God has the last word because he holds everything in his hand.

the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands…"[3] These words introduce the reader, without any doubt, to one of the most magnificent passages in the whole New Testament, and in the whole Bible for that matter. It depicts not only an awe-inspiring image of a innumerable multitude before the throne of God but it also reveals the completion of God's purposes for humanity and the end result of all ministry and mission of the church. The Great Commission has been fulfilled![4] It is with this high vision in mind and heart that the Christian church today has the privilege of approaching ministry and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. This vision can give impetus to the search for a better understanding of the principles of mission work and for better ways for reaching the world with the Good News.

In the last century, the global Church seems to have come to a much better understanding of its calling. World evangelism, disciple-making, church planting and church growth have drawn global attention and, in the first part of the 21st century, there seems to be a renewed vision for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. In the background of it all, stand historic moments of critical importance like the birth of the Lausanne movement. With the globalization of the world as well as the advancement of technologies and transportation, there has been an unprecedented development in global missions and missionaries are now able to reach the world like never before. Yet, there is a serious challenge to face.

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[3] *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008). All quotations in this thesis-project are from the ESV translation of the Bible, unless otherwise indicated.

[4] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 30.

A Stark Reality

While Jesus was with his disciples, already in the beginning of his public ministry and after healing numbers of people and casting out demons, he came to a critical conclusion. As a fine observer of the human reality and human need, Jesus could discern a conflicting set of circumstances: the harvest was plentiful but there were not enough workers on the field (Matthew 9:35-38). Jesus' words reverberate in an even more pressing way today. Pastors, church leaders, and missionaries can attest to the constant feeling of insufficiency and inadequacy in the face of the mission task at hand. Jesus pinpointed the solution to the problem – more workers who would be able to measure up with the harvest. He also advanced the pathway to the solution – prayer to the Lord of the harvest to send more workers to his harvest (Matthew 9:38). But where are these workers to come from and how are they to be prepared for the mission of God? And why is the church still experiencing the same struggle which Jesus identified already in the 1st century?

The Great Commission

Jesus did not leave his apostles in the dark as to his expectations and their future. His last words at the ascension marked their lives and further ministry and outlined a clear divine strategy for reaching the world with the Good News. The Great Commission has been the guiding mandate for the ministry of the Church for centuries. It is a magnificent expression of God's unchanging will, his perfect vision for the redemption of his creation, and his loving kindness to Jews and Gentiles alike. The Great Commission[5] is one of the fundamental claims of Jesus on his followers. It became the driving force for the ministry of the Early Church through

[5] The Great Commission is recorded in one form or another in the four gospels. The Gospel of Matthew seems to introduce it in the most comprehensive way (cf. Matthew 28:16-20).

the work of the apostles, their successors, and the local Christian communities. There is probably no other command or instruction of our Lord that has played such a crucial role in shaping the mission and evangelistic efforts of the local and global church than the words of Jesus: "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19).[6] The command of Jesus is unambiguous as to its main thrust and the Great Commission obviously offers the guidelines for the enterprise of reaching the world with the Good News.[7]

A Commission To The Church Today

The church today is facing countless challenges of different nature and magnitude. New social realities are changing and replacing long-established ideas and status quo. The world is seeking to re-define itself in search of identity and meaning. The pervasive role of technology already raises questions as to its long-term benefits and potential harm to the human brain and to society as a whole. Human interaction and relationships are undergoing an unpredictable mutation. The ministry of the church in the last few decades has been adapting to these new realities and evolving in ways which are placing more importance and value on certain aspects (e.g., numeric church growth) at the expense of others (e.g., evangelism and disciple-making).

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[6] *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008).

[7] The original Greek language of the Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew 28:16-20, helps us distinguish and interpret the command with a lot more clarity and precision. Some, or a lot of this clarity, has been lost in translation due to the differences in the appropriate wording and grammar of other languages. The command clearly outlines four actions, i.e. going, make disciples, baptizing, and teaching. Of these four, "make disciples" is the only actual verb while the other three are participles which normally cannot stand alone but are instead subject to the main verb. So the main thrust of the command resides with the main verb of "make disciples" while going, baptizing and teaching come as supporting actions in the process of the main action. "Go" could certainly be interpreted as a call to action and taking the initiative. "Baptizing" definitely refers to the process of bringing someone to the faith and leading them in the direction of repentance and turning to God, all of it resulting in water baptism. And finally, "teaching" refers to the process of coming alongside a believer and leading them in a process of growing learning about God and of sanctification. What is interesting is that the whole command and its different parts refer to a process in time and suggest a process based on an ever-developing relationship, not merely telling someone the Good News. A detailed discussion on the language and theological implications of the Great Commission will follow in chapter 2 of this work.

The proliferation of parachurch organizations is as much a refreshing breath on the ministry platform as it is a symptom of a problem, namely that in certain critical areas of ministry the church is not only doing an insufficient amount of work but, in a lot of cases, it is surrendering these areas to specialized parachurch organizations.[8] In a hurried world in which the focus is on instant gratification, the church often pushes aside evangelism and discipleship that require time and long-term investment in people.

In Christian ministry, experience has often taken over theology, method over principle, practicality over biblical foundations. This tendency is particularly observable in our lifetime and reinforced by the pragmatic and individualistic Western culture, which forces the church into a mold of ministry that is shaped by immediate gratification and obsession with numbers. In such culture, the church, without even realizing it, often falls prey to the same driving forces, which move businesses and secular organizations. Yet, there seems to be a growing realization among evangelicals that it is not enough to attempt doing the ministry to which we are called unless we follow the example of the Master who has called us. So, the need becomes more and more pressing for the church to return to sound biblical foundations for its ministry and for its call to make disciples of all nations. This is a no small challenge. But it is the only viable way of getting a realistic opportunity to reach out to the whole world with the Good News of our Lord Jesus.

When writing about the weakness of the church in these areas, Robert E. Coleman diagnoses the situation accurately: "Jesus' plan has not been disavowed; it has just been

[8] This author believes that the church and parachurch organizations play a vital role in the advancement of God's kingdom and could be excellent and indispensible partners in ministry. It has to be admitted that parachurch ministries are often able to provide specialized services and training that can only enhance and fortify the ministry of the church. The sadness that comes with these benefits is dual. First, the church seems to be too comfortable resigning from certain areas of ministry and leaving them to be done only by the parachurch organizations. A good case in point would be the outreach to college and university students in Bulgaria that the local churches have completely abandoned into the hands of parachurch student outreach organizations. Second, the parachurch organizations seem to be inclined to often conduct their ministries outside the context of the local church and to produce fruit that is only or primarily re-invested in the parachurch ministry itself. In this way, more than a few parachurch organizations turn *de facto* into unofficial church entities.

ignored."[9] This reality of course is no reason to despair. The Great Commission has not changed as the fundamental mandate to the church. The current reality, however, needs to be addressed so the church could step up to its call in this world. And, this means that an evaluation of the church's evangelistic efforts and disciple-making practices is needed. Such an evaluation on a global level could be certainly a wonderful asset to the ministry of the global church[10] but an evaluation of the local church communities and Christian movements is even more relevant as it relates to a specific fellowship of Christ-followers and their lives and ministry in a particular context.

In order to be truthful to modern church history, it should be acknowledged that refreshing movements of thought and practice within the Christian community have challenged the contemporary trends in Christian ministry and in evangelistic practices in particular. In the last decades, the return to biblical thinking and exploration of the example of Jesus in training disciples to reach out to the lost world is a fact. Suffice it to mention the seminal work of Robert E. Coleman in the field of evangelism and discipleship.[11] Already in the early 1960s Coleman offered a fresh way of understanding the command of Jesus and the fulfillment of the Great Commission in light of the ministry of Jesus himself. In his fascinating exploration of the example of Jesus, Coleman consciously moved away from focusing on and interpreting specific methods of evangelism and discipleship. Instead, he offered a much needed return to the

[9] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 96.

[10] One more recent such evaluation on the state of global Christianity could be helpful at least in broad terms as it touches on issues of and provides statistics on world evangelism. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022). The report is available for free download at https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/ (Accessed March 5, 2023)

[11] Robert E. Coleman has produced a number of invaluable resources making a clear return to the Scriptures as a guiding light and the example of Jesus as the model and inspiration in evangelism and disciple-making. Among many, see especially Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008).

principles on which Jesus founded his disciple-making ministry and "which determined his methods."[12] Principles matter because of their rather intransient nature and applicability while methods tend to change and evolve with time. Yet, Coleman recognizes that apart from a few more serious studies done in the past, "the subject of Jesus' basic strategy has rarely been given the attention it deserves."[13]

The Local Church

The local church is the specific expression of the global church and gives it a concrete dimension. It is the gathering of Christ-followers united in fellowship and worship by the same spiritual experience of conversion, baptism, commitment to spiritual growth, and call from God to be his people and to fulfill his mission to the world. The local church is God's instrument for reaching out to the local community with the Good News of salvation not in abstract terms and in theory but in reality and in practice. It is through the ministry of the local church that God's love, care, and forgiveness are communicated to real people with real lives and real spiritual need of restoration to the right relationship with God. One may be tempted to say that God is not limited by or dependent on humans or human willingness to fulfill his purposes and that would be correct. Yet, it is also true that God, in his perfect will, has *desired* and *determined* to fulfill his purposes by using humans, created in his image.[14] In that sense, the role of the local church is undeniably crucial.

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[12] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 14.

[13] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 15.

[14] This fact is extraordinary and not always easy to grasp. God's choice of humans like us as ministry "partners" is quite adventurous but we have to trust God in his sovereign will and purposes and affirm that if this is God's choice, then it must be the perfect strategy to accomplish his mission.

A Scope To Consider

The command of Jesus to make disciples clearly implies working towards expanding God's kingdom with a scope of nothing less than the whole world. What is more, it calls for more than just sharing the Good News with people in order to bring them to an encounter with the Savior. A process in time is anticipated, in which a person who has professed faith in God has the opportunity to learn what it means to be a follower of Jesus and to grow in Christ-likeness. But the aim of this process is also a means to a further goal, namely that the disciple would in turn *reproduce* by making disciples – a simple, yet profound strategy, which reveals the genius of Jesus' mind and the perfection of his plan.

The Great Commission and the heavenly vision of its fulfillment in Revelation form a temporal *inclusio*, of which the global church is a part in *the already but not yet* period between Jesus' first coming and the consummation of all human history. John's vision in Revelation 7:9 paints a vivid picture of the global character of the multitude gathered before the throne of God. At the same time, John takes special care to emphasize the particularity of this amazing multitude. He must have wanted to make sure his readers get a full grasp of the diverse and inclusive nature of the countless multitude, specifically describing it as being "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." The history of Christian mission reflects to a large degree the process of the making of this multitude through the proclamation of the Good News all over the world and among people groups of which a regular church goer has probably never heard.[15] One thing is sure, the gospel belongs to the whole wide world and the salvation of the world hangs on the fulfillment of the Great Commission among *all people groups*.

[15] Ruth Tucker offers an excellent biographical account on the development of world missions from the time of the early church to nowadays and reveals a lot about the life and ministry efforts of missionaries all over the world. But she also familiarizes the reader with different parts of the world and people groups, of which many

A People Group in Dire Need

In the small country of Bulgaria,[16] the Gypsy community is one of the most significant and distinctive minorities.[17] The Gypsy church community is growing through very basic street evangelism and church planting. However, church planting is driven not so much by a vision or by pursuing an intentional strategy and making deliberate efforts but mostly as a result of internal controversy and endless church splits. There is also a noticeable disturbing reality: for the most part, the Gypsy Christian communities have no notion of discipleship and disciple-making. They lack understanding of the Great Commission and, as a result, there are no efforts to train disciples of Jesus. Reaching out to this community with the Good News through simple addition will continue to produce only limited results. A different approach and a different strategy towards this goal will be needed and will have the potential to introduce change and achieve much better results for the expansion of the kingdom of God in this community.

The Gypsy Minority[18]

With a typical dark color skin, hair, eyes,[19] and a characteristic way of dressing, it is not difficult to recognize and single out a Gypsy individual.[20] Historically, it is considered that the

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readers are probably unaware. Ruth Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya:.A Biographical History of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1983).

[16] The territory of the whole country of Bulgaria is comparable to the size of the state of Tennessee in the United States.

[17] In the last three years, I have been working as a missionary in Bulgaria. By the Lord's guidance, I have become involved in mission work among the Gypsy and Turkish-speaking minorities, which opened new horizons for me personally but also presented a number of challenges. I have been familiar with these two Bulgarian sub-cultures from the past but, now that I am actually involved in Christian mission work among them, I have been able to encounter these cultures in a new way and to familiarize myself with them on a much deeper level.

[18] The publications on the Gypsy community, its history, culture, customs and religion is very scarce. A lot more is known and orally transmitted than officially written and published in Bulgarian.

Gypsies originated from India and started migrating sometime in the 5th century AD, first to Persia and various other countries, before some of them traveled to the Balkans area, including Bulgaria, and more widely to most of Europe.[21] Today, the larger Gypsy community is more of a diaspora with groups of Gypsy settlers in many European countries. In general, Gypsies are known for their nomadic lifestyle. This was also true of the Gypsy community in Bulgaria but, in more recent decades, there has been a shift and now most of them tend to settle at the outskirt suburbs (truly ghettos) of a town and live a more sedentary life. The larger Gypsy community is scattered all over the country and one can find smaller or bigger pockets of Gypsy settlers in virtually any part of the country.[22]

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[19] According to a Gypsy legend about the creation of the Gypsies, God made dough from pale mud but left it for too long in the oven, and so came out a black person. Then God made another batch of dough but did not leave it long enough in the oven, so came out a white person. Finally, God made a third batch of dough and this time baked it very carefully, so came out the Gypsy person with chocolate-colored skin. This is the legend's explanation for why God loves Gypsies so much - because he put so much work into creating them. Siyka Chavdarova and Vassil Chaprazov, *The Journey of the Roma People* (Bulgaria, Sofia: Kuna, 2009), 52.

[20] The word "Gypsy" (in Bulgarian: "tziganin" - masculine / "tziganka" - feminine) has been the traditional term used to describe this minority. In more recent years, especially after the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria, the term "Roma" has been introduced as a more respectful form while the term "Gypsy" is now considered as somewhat of an offensive way to refer to the minority. In some countries the term "Romani" is also used. In the few available published resources, the authors do not agree as to the right way of referring to Gypsies. Chavdarova and Chaprazov claim that "Roma" is the common name. What is even more interesting is that, according to them, the term "Gypsy" comes from the time Gypsy migrants settled in Egypt. On the other hand, Slavov is adamant that the Bulgarian word is "Gypsy." Atanas Slavov, *The World of the Gypsies: Brief History* (Bulgaria, Yambol: IPK Svetlina AD, 2002), 6. Linguistically, these terms are truly interchangeable and for the purposes of this thesis-project, I will prefer to use the word "Gypsy" because I believe it is the more recognizable word worldwide.

[21] According to Karahassan-Chanar, the earliest information about Gypsy presence in Bulgaria dates from the beginning of the 9th century. This fact is significant because, if true, it places the settlement of the Gypsy community only a few centuries after the founding of Bulgaria in AD 681. Karahassan-Chanar also notes that in 1971, at the first world Gypsy congress, the name "Roma" was adopted to be used to designate the Gypsies worldwide. Ibrahim Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria* (Bulgaria, Sofia: Lik, 2005), 147-148, 154.

[22] Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 153-154.

In 2021, the population of Bulgaria was 6,519,789.[23] The Gypsy community is the second largest minority in the country after the Muslims and represents over 4% of the country's population.[24] It is far from being a homogeneous community. To a white Bulgarian, all Gypsies look and act the same. However, Gypsies distinguish themselves by a variety of well-defined local clans and tend to live within their tribal divisions, often defined by their inherited trade or social status (e.g., musicians, wood workers, blacksmiths, poorest of the poor, etc.). What makes this community even more important with regards to outreach and discipleship is the fact that it is a growing minority. Different factors contribute to such growth, among which are certainly the higher birth rate and lower migration ability but also probably sexual promiscuity, more limited access to and little use of birth control, and Gypsy culture itself, in which having more children is the norm.[25]

[23] Data from the last census in 2021, provided by the Bulgarian National Statistical Institute. https://www.nsi.bg/bg/content/19806/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%81%D1%8A%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%89%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5/%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5-%D0%BA%D1%8A%D0%BC-7-%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BF%D1%82%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B 2%D1%80%D0 %B8-2021-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0. Accessed March 7, 2023.

[24] The 2021 census results place the Gypsy community at over 266 thousand members. These are results solely based self-identification. https://infostat.nsi.bg/infostat/pages/reports/result.jsf?x_2=2002. Accessed March 28, 2023. At the same time, other governmental information indicates that already in 2011, the Gypsy community was at 5% of the total population of the country. https://nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/196. Accessed March 7, 2023. In the Gypsy ghettos, more than a few are undocumented so any official census cannot account for their presence. Unofficial word-of-mouth numbers range anywhere from 300-800 thousand. Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 153.

[25] In the predominant white Bulgarian culture, families tend to have fewer children due to economic and cultural reasons. Before the communist regime came to power in the 1940s, Bulgarians had large families and often 5-10 children. The dire living conditions and economic dependence on the government during the 45-year communist dictatorship forced families to have one child or two children at most. Today's trend, over thirty years after the fall of the oppressive regime, seems to follow the established family patterns during communism. Karahassan-Chanar demonstrates that the number of Gypsies is growing in the last 120 years. He attributes this growth mainly to higher birth rate among Gypsies and lower migration ability. Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 153.

The Gypsy family is a main token in their community. To this day, a number of Gypsy marriages are arranged by the parents and girls are given in marriage as early as 13-years old.[26] More often than one would want to think would be the case, young girls are being sold in marriage which provides financial benefit to the girl's family of origin and allows them to continue caring for the rest of their children.[27] By the time they reach their early twenties, most young families already have two or more children. This, of course, has significant ramifications for a young Gypsy boy or a girl and their schooling, and it often creates an inability to continue their education. In many cases, families would only allow a female child to attend classes until the end of elementary school in order to minimize the risk of the girl being "stolen" while in school by a prospective husband's family and thus losing the opportunity for financial benefits from the marriage.

In general, Gypsies are known for their very low level of education or lack of any education.[28] This is probably one of the key aspects of the Gypsy community, which plays a crucial role in shaping their social and economic status. Their lower education contributes to a predictable difficulty finding jobs and to working the lowest-paying jobs in the country. The Gypsy community is an example par excellence of a community caught in a self-perpetuating

[26] The lawful age for marriage in Bulgaria is eighteen. https://www.justice.government.bg/home/normdoc/2135637484/. Accessed March 30, 2023. Yet, many Gypsy families are formed at a younger age with official wedding celebrations but without any formal documentation. In addition, many Gypsy families live purposefully without a formally recognized marriage by the state because this allows them to claim social benefits and child support from the state as single parents with multiple children. Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 150.

[27] Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 150.

[28] Schooling in Bulgaria is mandatory for all children until finishing eighth grade. In more recent years, the Bulgarian government, supported by the European Union, has made significant efforts at integrating minorities in the country. This includes passing of legislative acts to provide government assistance to minority families as long as their children attend school regularly. This has encouraged, if not forced, many Gypsy families to actually send their children to school in order not to forfeit their opportunity to receive financial benefits from the state. According to Karahassan-Chanar, by the year 2005, almost 70% of Gypsies had no education or had only finished 3rd grade. Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 154.

cycle of poverty and crime. Unfortunately, this is exactly the profile that the whole minority has helped establish and maintain for decades. The descriptive word that immediately emerges in the minds of most white Bulgarians at the very mention of Gypsies is "thieves." This is the standard image among most Bulgarians, and even more so among non-Christians. Because of this lasting image, during the 45-year communist dictatorship in Bulgaria, the government led very strong racial politics and implemented a strategy of ostracizing minorities by secluding them into separate suburbs (ghettos) of each city and by offering them the lowest-paying jobs in order to keep them in a dependent state and, as much as possible, separate from the white Bulgarian society. The overall sentiments of the white Bulgarian community towards the Gypsies range from indifference, to disdain, and to overt racism. The 2016 human rights report of the United States Department of State rightly points out on Bulgaria that "the marginalization of and societal intolerance towards the Romani minority remained the country's most pressing human rights problem."[29] Unfortunately, these sentiments are also characteristic of the way, in which white Bulgarian churches look at the Gypsy community and even at the Gypsy Christian community. This attitude has contributed to a similar attitude of the Gypsy community towards white Bulgarians.[30]

[29] United States Department of State: 2016 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Bulgaria. https://www.state.gov/reports/2016-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/bulgaria/. Accessed March 27, 2023. The trend continues and according to the 2022 report, "societal intolerance against minority groups persisted and manifested in frequent discrimination against Roma and ethnic Turks. Political and government actors sometimes condoned or prompted it." https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/bulgaria/. Accessed March 27, 2023.

[30] Here it would be appropriate to note that for this project the author contacted the local chapter of the Gypsy organization working on the integration of Gypsies, whose projects are largely supported financially by programs for integration of the European Union. Unfortunately, his request for help with any information on Gypsy history, culture, customs, and any relevant statistics was denied.

Life In A Gypsy Ghetto[31]

In recent years, there has been a tendency for Gypsies to move to the countryside where they can find much cheaper housing, form new communities, and enjoy better living than in the ghetto. However, the majority of Gypsies in Bulgaria are still concentrated in suburb-like districts of most cities and towns. These areas are very densely populated and usually several generations of a family live under the same roof. On the one hand, this provides more stability, passing on of family tradition, and support for the younger families and their children. On the other hand, it also creates enmeshed relationships and prevents the younger generations from breaking away from long-established patterns of life, including the cycle of poverty and lack of education.

In poorer ghettos, most buildings and homes are attached to one another and are illegally built without a sewer system in place and often without running water. In many places, electricity is also lacking and wood is traditionally used for heating and cooking. Homes often house both people and animals on the same floor. In some neighborhoods, the streets are paved and easily accessible. But in most Gypsy settlements the streets are but narrow muddy walkways accessible only on foot, by bicycle, or a small horse cart. Most Gypsy children spend their time on the streets, playing in the mud barefoot and sometimes half-naked. Gypsies in the ghettos are plagued by widespread alcoholism, drug addiction, and gambling, all of which create a big challenge to evangelism and Christian ministry but also presents a big opportunity for outreach and kingdom work. The summer is wedding time and enormous wedding celebrations take place on each corner with deafening music and belly dancing on the street. The overall sense of

[31] When describing a group of people, a country, or an ethnic group, there is always a risk of over-generalizing. The author's attempt here is provide a very concise picture of the Gypsy community and way of life. Within that community, there are certainly notable differences and many exceptions to the predominant lifestyle, housing, education, professional carrier, and social status.

hopelessness and resignation seem to be countered by feasting, as life continues the same day after day and mere survival remains the main daily concern. These aspects of Gypsy life are far from being unimportant. In fact, they play a significant role in shaping the Gypsy mind and heart. What is more, they contribute in many ways to the way the Gypsy Christian faith community exists, understands ministry, and operates in the midst of their wider Gypsy society.

The Gypsy Christian Community

Since the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, the Christian faith has penetrated well the ghettos and villages populated by Gypsies. Today, there are churches established virtually in every Gypsy community.[32] New Gypsy churches emerge all the time but, as mentioned earlier, most of them are not the result of actual church planting but of constant church conflict and splits. Despite this fact, God is using the human imperfections and the Christian community among Gypsies is witnessing some growth and expansion. Nevertheless, growth can have different dimensions. It would be hard to speak about significant numeric growth because the back door of many Gypsy churches is wide open and, for those added to the church, there are a number of others who leave and return to their previous way of life, to never come back. Church swapping is also part of the picture. Spiritual growth is even more questionable and represents an even bigger challenge due to a combination of a number of cultural traits and ways in which ministry is understood. Gypsy church leaders have embraced a philosophy of ministry that not only does not contribute to quality spiritual development, but

[32] The first Gypsy church opened its doors in 1930 and the Gypsy Christian movement has been developing and growing ever since, although it also went through the same persecution as any other religious group in Bulgaria during the communist era. The fall of the regime marked a new stage of development and growth. According to Erolova and Slavkova, there may well be around 800 Gypsy churches in Bulgaria but the number is uncertain as is uncertain the exact number of evangelical Gypsy believers. Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria* (Bulgaria, Sofia: Paradigma, 2013), 59-70.

actually hinders disciple-making and discipleship. As a whole, pastors and church leaders only provide limited pastoral care and do not seem to have a vision for attending to individual church members and their families. Home visitation is rare and only takes place upon request from the sick and homebound. Sadly, even then, a pastoral visit only consists of prayer for healing and anointing with oil without any biblical or spiritual direction or comforting.

The wider Gypsy faith community is far from united. Different Gypsy churches are officially registered under a variety of denominations[33] and most of them tend to lean towards the more charismatic spectrum of the wider Christian community.[34] In some areas of the country, Gypsy denominations have been registered with the state and often attract and recruit newly formed churches from splits to come under their wings so they can demonstrate development and numeric growth. Some of the well-established white Bulgarian denominations, which have accepted Gypsy churches in their ranks,[35] have unfortunately given up on collaboration with them and only continue to provide formal registration to them without any ministry involvement, training of Gypsy ministers or support. This is due, to a large degree, to cultural differences and lack of patience and long-term commitment on the part of white Bulgarian Christian leaders to the work of God in the Gypsy community. Sadly, other denominations only take advantage of Gypsy churches among them by using them as statistics and fundraising tools.

[33] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 93.

[34] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 108.

[35] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 67-68.

Key Gypsy Cultural And Ministry Features Relevant To Disciple-Making

In his work with the general Gypsy community and Gypsy Christian churches in the last three years, this author has been able to identify at least ten cultural features and ministry patterns, which he believes, raise serious barriers to or create opportunities for the fulfillment of the Great Commission among them. These patterns translate also into the overall church culture and become a hindrance to church growth, evangelism, disciple-making, church planting, and the pursuit of any ministry vision.

First, the Gypsy community does not have united leadership and many pastors and church leaders operate as islands to themselves. They do not seem to tolerate easily spiritual authority and their leadership style tends to be primarily authoritarian.[36] Many of them live in a self-fulfilling prophecy and constant fear that another leader from the church may take their position, which pushes them to exercise even more control and to become more and more territorial in their ministry. Why this is so relevant to disciple-making is the fact that the fear-driven ministry of a pastor keeps other church leaders and whole congregations at a certain level of spiritual knowledge and growth in order to make them dependent on the leadership of a single person. Such an approach to ministry goes against any possibility for training leaders, equipping the church for ministry,[37] and fulfilling the Great Commission. In addition, most churches have little to no organizational structure. In many cases, leadership teams and church councils are established as a formality but they never exercise their actual roles and the ministry, in terms of leadership, is conducted exclusively by the pastor of the church. What is more, most pastors do

[36] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 76-80.

[37] It is saddening when any church is incapacitated by lack of equipping of the saints and by excluding the role of the saints in God's calling to the church. Cf. Ephesians 4:11ff.

not understand and recognize the need for training successors, which often leaves the local church in chaos and creates power battles when a pastor passes away.[38] All of this could be both a challenge to and an opportunity for disciple-making. On the one hand, when a pastor carries on his[39] shoulders the whole ministry, he has no physical ability to dedicate time and to make any efforts at training disciples in an intentional manner. On the other hand, if the pastor of a church catches a vision for any aspect of ministry (including disciple-making), he will be able to steer the whole church in that direction and pursue disciple-making as a priority of the church.

Second, in most Gypsy churches there is little to no accountability on either leadership or congregational level. The pastor operates as a separate entity[40] and is usually not accountable to anyone for anything, be it doctrinally, spiritually, relationally or financially. Moreover, the church has neither structures nor policy in place to invite for or require any accountability. This observation is significant for the simple fact that discipleship and disciple-making without accountability is but an illusion. Jesus held his disciples accountable and "his plan of teaching, by example, assignment, and *constant checkup*, was calculated to bring up the best that was in them." (author's italics)[41] Bill Hull is certainly right that the contemporary church is not perceiving the benefits of accountability "because it knows little about discipling" and that one

[38] The old saying that there is no success without a successor rings true. More often than not, Gypsy pastors only allow for and prepare a son or a grandson from their own family to succeed them in the future. Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 78-79.

[39] I use the masculine here intentionally to refer to male pastors because there are no female pastors among Gypsies in Bulgaria. See further comments on male-driven ministry at the end of this section.

[40] Churches in Bulgaria and Gypsy churches in particular usually have one pastor and, if another leader is in charge of any other part of the ministry of the church, he/she is not looked at as "pastor" of that ministry area (e.g., children's pastor, worship pastor, etc.) as it could be the case in many US churches.

[41] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 86. In his chapter on the principle of supervision, Coleman provides excellent reflections on the life and ministry of Jesus with his disciples and the way Jesus exercised constant checkup on his disciples in order to encourage them, correct them, and guide them in the right direction.

simply "cannot make disciples without accountability."[42] But where accountability is present, in the words of Joe Aldrich, "growth inevitably follows."[43] If the Gypsy church is to become obedient to the Great Commission and to start training disciples, it will have to be taught and trained in order to develop an understanding about accountability and its critical role "as a catalyst for growth"[44] and a key stepping stone towards obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus and reaching the Gypsy community with the gospel.

Third, Gypsy culture and the Gypsy Christian community exhibit a past-present orientation. It has been recognized in cross-cultural studies and counseling that different cultures and minorities operate from a different temporal standpoint and their lives are differently oriented with regards to the past-present-future continuum.[45] The United States and other Western societies tend to be future-oriented while many minorities and the societies from the majority world seem to adhere to a past-present or present orientation. In other words, Gypsies look back to their roots and ancestral heritage where they find their identity, stability and wisdom. They also live in the present and are focused on the here-and-now while the future is not so much in their life scope. This cultural feature is not difficult to explain. The uncertainty of life, ethnic segregation, no hope for the future, and material scarcity, anchor a Gypsy family into the past-present. Their most essential preoccupation are not the dreams for the future. Their main

[42] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1990), 217.

[43] Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 2006), 112.

[44] Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 103. In Chan's view, accountability is required as one of the ten commitments of the disciple-making church.

[45] Derald W. Sue and David Sue, *Counseling The Culturally Diverse: Theory and Practice* (Hoboken. NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008), 199-200.

concern is about daily survival, finding a job for the day, feeding a starving child, procuring wood for the stove and anything else that unrolls in and is relevant to the present moment.

Minorities with past-present orientation are more likely "so seek immediate, concrete solution than future-oriented, abstract goals."[46] Planning and strategizing by looking forward is not part of the life vocabulary of an average Gypsy person. And it is not part of the Gypsy church's view of life and ministry either. This is a serious challenge, with which many missionaries and Bulgarian churches struggle in their ministry interactions with the Gypsy Christian community. It could be also a major hurdle to trying to instill a vision for disciple-making among Gypsy pastors and church leaders. It may be difficult to overcome their resistance to setting of long-term goals, adhering to time schedules, and following a disciple-making process with a vision that goes beyond today and tomorrow. This cultural feature also comes, almost inevitably, in a combination with the next one.

Fourth, the Gypsy community represents a typical case of a culture with external *locus of control*.[47] Research demonstrates that minorities and groups with lower socioeconomic status "score significantly higher on the external end of the locus-of-control continuum."[48] This is to say that Gypsies perceive the events and circumstances of their lives as a result of external factors, i.e. someone or something else is responsible or guilty – the state, the Bulgarian majority, the boss at work, discrimination or impersonal forces like chance and luck. What an external locus of control reflects and reinforces is helplessness and powerlessness to face the

[46] Derald W. Sue and David Sue, *Counseling The Culturally Diverse*, 200.

[47] Derald W. Sue and David Sue, *Counseling The Culturally Diverse*, 294. Sue & Sue provide a very helpful discussion on the way people perceive the degree to which they themselves *or* external factors determine the course and circumstances of their life. This perception was formally defined as *locus of control* - a concept and a term formulated and developed by Julian B. Rotter in the middle of the 20th century. People with a perception of external locus of control tend to think that no matter what they do, nothing can change and it is not worth even trying. It is a fatalistic attitude that engenders a passive and avoidant stance towards the circumstances of life.

[48] Derald W. Sue and David Sue, *Counseling The Culturally Diverse*, 294.

challenges of the day and of the future. It is an engrained conviction that one's own decisions and actions cannot determine or influence any outcome for a set goal. This cultural feature has to be taken seriously because of its strong potential to sabotage any conscious effort in trying to instill a vision among Gypsy church leaders for disciple-making and it can prevent pastors from seeing in themselves the potential to be an active part in fulfilling the Great Commission. Past-present orientation and external locus of control tie into another critical cultural feature – lack of intentionality.

Fifth, the Gypsy community can be characterized by lack of vision and intentionality. This is particularly true of most Gypsy churches. A biblical vision for disciple-making is vital to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. A vision for anything could be a wonderful thing but, unless a conscious intent about fulfilling that vision is present and unless there is a specific strategy to pursue it, a vision could easily remain nothing more than a dream never come true. Our Lord Jesus led the way by setting the pattern for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in his own earthly life and ministry. None of Jesus' actions or words were random ministry efforts. Jesus moved forward in training the Twelve with a vision and he was deliberately intentional in all his dealings with the disciples. Jesus never lost sight of the vision of God's kingdom and the mission for which he came to earth. He intentionally devised a strategy with the end goal in mind and he concentrated his efforts on developing an "ever-enlarging labor force, and in time, through multiplication, workers will bring the Good News to the ends of the earth."[49] The local church in many places including the Gypsy faith community is "a mile wide but an inch deep" just because there are no clear goals in view and no strategy to pursue them when it comes to

[49] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 53.

fulfilling the Great Commission.[50] However, disciple-making is not an event and "spiritual growth is not automatic."[51] They demand from the church to be intentional about them and Jim Putman is right when he outlines intentionality as one of the three keys to success in the mission of making disciples.[52] This means that the existing Gypsy church needs to recapture the vision of eternity and distance itself from anything that does not contribute to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. It also entails becoming deliberate about pouring life into followers of Jesus, looking outward, and re-centering lives and ministry on the things of eternal relevance. Anything else is, to use Coleman's sharp assessment, "an exercise in futility."[53] However, Chan warns that for many churches to even become intentional about disciple-making, it could take no less than five to seven years because "growth takes time."[54]

Sixth, the Gypsy minority and the Gypsy church are a community-based culture. Gypsies value the collective over the individual, interdependence over independence.[55] They prefer to live, work, commune in groups and the nuclear family is inevitably woven into the fabric of the larger clan and cannot exist individualistically. Children are not raised strictly by their mother and father but by the larger family including grandparents, uncles and aunts, older cousins and anyone else family- or non-family related. This could be a particular advantage to pastors and church leaders in disciple-making because it provides an already developed network of

[50] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 76.

[51] Chan, *A Certain Kind,* 52.

[52] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010), 23.

[53] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 23.

[54] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 94.

[55] To some, it may be surprising that the majority world operates based on a similar cultural framework, which is in stark contrast with white America and the rest of the Western world which value individualism and independence, self-sufficiency, pride, competition, modern (rather) non-hierarchical and nuclear family structures. Helpful descriptions of these various cultural aspects and differences between societies could be found in Sue & Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*.

relationships and connections in a close-knit community that could be easily gathered in small groups and discipled.

Seventh, as already mentioned above, the Gypsy community suffers from a very low level of education and widespread illiteracy plagues the whole community as well as the Gypsy church. For many, the written Word of God is of no value unless it is preached or spoken, i.e. verbally communicated. The Gypsy language itself has no alphabet and is using the Bulgarian (Cyrillic) alphabet to spell Gypsy wording[56] but for the most part Gypsy churches use the Bulgarian translation of the Bible. It also borrows numerous words from Bulgarian because of lack of equivalents in the Gypsy language itself. Worldwide, orality is more widespread than one would think. Avery Willis Jr. attests that "more than two-thirds of the world's population are oral communicators and do not comprehend literal presentations of the gospel."[57] This aspect represents a significant limitation from a teaching, training, and disciple-making standpoint. It implies that training and mobilizing pastors and church leaders will require simplification as well as the use of more visual aids to facilitate understanding and to enable better learning. Orality comes with another challenge – limitations in solid theological training and increased vulnerability to false teaching and heresy, which is the essence of the following point.

Eight, the Gypsy Christian church does not have any significant theological program and training within its own community. In certain areas, there are attempts to conduct short and basic Bible courses with a view of preparing candidates for pastoral ordination but it is more than clear

[56] Karahassan-Chanar, *The Ethnic Minorities in Bulgaria*, 155. The legend about not having their own alphabet language is quite comical. It recounts a story that God offered the Gypsies an alphabet but wrote it on a cabbage leaf which a donkey ate and left the people without an alphabet.

[57] Avery T. Willis Jr., *Response to Hiebert's Article "The Gospel in Human Contexts" and to the Responses of Pocock and Whiteman* in David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds. *Missionshift:Global Mission Issues In The Third Millennium.* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 150.

that a higher-level theological training must come from outside the Gypsy community.[58] The same holds true about training pastors to engage their faith communities in disciple-making. The lack of serious theological education creates at least one weakness and one very pronounced danger. First, the weakness consists in the fact that the low level of biblical and theological knowledge contributes to low level of quality preaching, teaching, and any other form of ministry. Second, the danger is that the Gypsy community is probably one of the most vulnerable ones with regards to false teaching and heresy because pastors, let alone congregations, are not able to discern true from false. The current state of affairs is largely the result of the Bulgarian church, which is locally present but abdicating from its leading role and responsibility to provide the necessary long-term guidance and theological training to the Gypsy community. Disciple-making vision development and training from outside the Gypsy church will be required in order to create an opportunity for an intentional pursuit of the Great Commission.

Ninth, the ministry of most Gypsy churches consists exclusively of countless worship services and commitment to ministry is predominantly event-based. The typical ministry schedule of a random Gypsy church includes four to five worship services each week.[59] The church does not conduct any Bible study or other biblical or ministerial training. The sheer number of worship gatherings during the week stuns the development of any other area of ministry, eats up the time for training, and derails the possibility for disciple-making. The situation is a result of an incomplete philosophy of ministry that only focuses on corporate

[58] Short-term missionary visits and seminars certainly play a positive role but their long-lasting affect is rather questionable. The lack of long-term commitment and follow-up determine a weak end result from the beginning. In the area of discipleship, organizations like Youth With A Mission (YWAM) conduct work among Gypsies but it seems to be focused more on life-transformation and life-application subjects, personal growth, marriage development and other areas, not towards training disciple-makers per se.

[59] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 72.

worship at the expense of any other ministry, biblically intrinsic to the church. The problem is far from being a local peculiarity. Jim Putman rightly identifies the issue as relevant to the church at large. When the pastor is preoccupied with even one weekly service, and in this case with numerous weekly services, in Putman's own words, "the pastor is too busy to create a system by which people are being discipled."[60] Speaking of the demands of discipleship, Putman correctly identifies the problem, adding that "discipleship demands intentionality and relationship - by which each person is invested in specifically. This cannot happen in the worship service."[61] This is not to underestimate the role of corporate worship. Gathering together is not only important but indispensible. In addition, "preaching is a key part of the disciple-making process, but preaching alone will not make disciples."[62] The Gypsy church could take advantage of the tremendous opportunity that people are already committed to the events of corporate worship services and, with proper disciple-making training, could transform some of their gatherings into a platform for disciple-making and so as to start fulfilling the Great Commission.

Tenth, the Gypsy faith community has a strictly male-driven leadership and ministry.[63] The wider Bulgarian evangelical community, with some exceptions, does not allow for female pastors and only some Christian circles would allow for women to be in certain leadership positions. This is even more so in Gypsy Christian circles, which creates a major handicap

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[60] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 23.

[61] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 23.

[62] Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 146.

[63] Yelis Erolova and Magdalena Slavkova, *Ethnicity, Religion and Migration of the Gypsies in Bulgaria*, 76, 88-93. Erolova and Slavkova provide a discussion on the role of the woman / Gypsy pastor's wife in the Gypsy Christian community and of her ministry involvement, which normally elevates the good reputation of the male pastor. They also point out that the circles, in which women have a better opportunity to be involved in any leadership role are those with more charismatic background. In addition, they outline a helpful distinction and explain the typical role of the male pastor in terms of *institutional authority* as opposed to the woman's / pastor's wife's role in terms of *inspirational authority* and their involvement as worship leaders, praying for the sick, etc.

because it is mutilating the church from a large part of its membership in ministry. Gypsy women faithfully attend worship gatherings but are excluded from most male fellowship outside the services and from any other church function. This in itself prevents and discourages Gypsy women from pursuing any meaningful personal development and spiritual growth. It remains a big question how, if at all, Gypsy women could be led in any form of disciple-making, especially if no Gypsy women are being trained to make disciples of Jesus.

These ten cultural features and ministry patterns have been identified not with a goal of making a value judgment but in order to discern and define the major challenges and opportunities these features present vis-à-vis disciple-making training for Gypsy pastors and church leaders and their own position for applying any such training in their local ministry context.

Mission Possible

In light of all the observations so far, it is not unreasonable to conclude that many Gypsy churches in their ministry are basically spinning their wheels, that they are not obedient to the Great Commission, and that they are missing a historical opportunity to reach their whole communities with the gospel because they are only pursuing the expansion of God's kingdom by making converts (addition) instead of making disciples of Jesus (multiplication). This is not to undermine their past and current ministry development, progress, and successes. However, in the critical area of disciple-making and reaching the world with the Good News, the following pressing question has to be raised and addressed: *What can be done to help Gypsy church leaders to develop a vision for the Great Commission and to begin initiating conscious efforts at training disciples in their local churches?* The basic conviction behind this question is not *if* something

could be done but that *it is* doable in the first place. And then, the question becomes *in what particular way* could a vision for disciple-making be instilled in Gypsy church leaders so they can commit to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The calling of Jesus in the Great Commission transcends time and culture. It may be contextualized and applied differently in different cultural settings and ministry contexts but the certainty of its applicability and its expected results are firmly established and guaranteed by Jesus' own promise to be with those who make disciples (Matthew 28:20). The history of the global church attests to the feasibility and success of the enterprise.

Gypsy church leaders will have to decide where they want their ministry to count, to use Coleman's poignant statement, "in the momentary applause of popular recognition or in the reproduction of our lives in a few chosen people who will carry on our work after we have gone." This indeed "becomes a big decision in the ministry."[64] In the Gypsy Christian community, disciple-making and discipleship seem to be, to use Hull's metaphor, just "like the kid on the playground who is chosen last – others don't realize what he can do until they are desperate and they give him a chance."[65] This is the chance, which Gypsy church leaders must be given first in order to be able to make that decision for their churches. And, for this to happen, there must be a beginning point. Coleman rightly says that if there are no people in the church who are able and equipped to train disciples, then the church "should be training some."[66]

[64] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 32.

[65] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church,* 208.

[66] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 42.

The Thesis-Project

This thesis-project was developed as a result of the search for answers and practical steps towards helping local Gypsy church leaders embrace disciple-making and win their communities for Christ by being obedient to the Great Commission. It aimed at igniting a spark among a small group of pastors by an approach, which hopefully could be replicated in the future in various Gypsy communities around Bulgaria and beyond. The *hypothesis* was that organized formal disciple-making training would help Gypsy pastors and church leaders to acquire knowledge and mobilize them to make first steps into engaging intentionally people from their churches in discipling relationships. In a smaller way, one could engage a Gypsy pastor or two into a long-term process of individual or small group training with the anticipation that one day they will reproduce the process and raise up a few disciples ready to disciple others. This would be the ideal process, which closely follows the example of Jesus himself. However, on a slightly larger scale, a more organized, formal and focused training of a group of pastors and church leaders would provide a bigger stepping stone and more immediate disciple-making input into a whole range of local Gypsy churches.[67] It would allow for a disciple-making process to begin right after the training and for follow-up as a platform for additional encouragement, guidance, and if necessary, correction.

These pastors participated in a formal four-week course on disciple-making, which discussed in depth the thrust of the Great Commission, the principles of disciple-making from

[67] This project and the adopted approach are a reflection of the author's own spiritual journey. For the first eighteen years after his conversion in 1991, following the fall of the communist dictatorship in Bulgaria, he eagerly sought spiritual help from more mature Christians and church leaders in pursuit of a desire to learn and grow spiritually. Unfortunately, there was no help. He was one of millions of Christ-followers who never get the opportunity to be discipled and to make disciples because there is no one to disciple them. Only years later, while he was pursuing his Master of Divinity degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, he stumbled across an evangelism and discipleship course taught by Dr. Robert E. Coleman, who skillfully revealed the Master plan of evangelism to his students. Following the course, this author immediately began to engage individuals into disciple-making relationships – work to which, on April 4, 2009, he committed the rest of his life.

the life and ministry of Jesus, and any questions of practical application. In addition, beyond the specific scope of this thesis-project, the author was able to extend post-training individual follow-up with some of the participants in order to track progress and encourage them further for reaching out and engaging individuals for discipling.

This thesis is defended first by providing in Chapter 2 a biblical and theological foundation for the call to make disciples, for incarnational relationships, and for multiplication. What follows in Chapter 3 is a review of four essential literary works relevant to the area of disciple-making and discipleship as it relates to both understanding and practical application. Chapter 4 will provide a detailed presentation on the project design and the rationale behind it, as well as a discussion on the pre- and post-training surveys and individual follow-up. Finally, Chapter 5 will report the outcome of the whole project and will provide an analysis of the results.

Work among the Gypsy communities and the pursuit of establishing a disciple-making movement may be critical, as this is the fastest growing minority in the country, which is also very open to the gospel. The Sliven region where the project was conducted is the second most highly populated region by Gypsies in the country with Gypsies representing almost 12% of the population.[68] With this come the challenge and the opportunity. One thing is sure, that if no specific attempts are made to introduce Gypsy pastors to the Great Commission and to disciple-making, the local Gypsy churches will continue to operate in the same ministry cycle that produces converts, but no disciples. What is at stake is not the success of a thesis-project but the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the salvation of the whole Gypsy minority in the Sliven region and in Bulgaria. The project took into account all the cultural and ministerial specifics outlined earlier and sought to offer viable and contextualized solutions in the hope that this training would become a pilot project, which will turn into a standard in the future.

[68] https://nccedi.government.bg/bg/node/196. Accessed March 15, 2023.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The Need For A Theological Foundation

Disciple-making is not an independent enterprise or an activity for its own sake or value. Instead, it is woven into and driven by an underlying need and a bigger goal, namely evangelism.[1] Robert E. Coleman aptly says that "our objective is the evangelization of the world, to be sure. But before much can be done to effectively reach the multitudes, the laboring force in the harvest must be multiplied. Every disciple made for Christ contributes to this ever-expanding working force."[2] Yet, making disciples would serve no purpose if God had not intervened in human history to extend a covenantal relationship with his creation as revealed in his Word.[3] In that sense, disciple-making and evangelism are deeply rooted in the heart of God as he is longing to be in a relationship with the humans he has created in his image. Only a proper theological understanding of God and his eternal purposes can inform, inspire, and sustain evangelism and

[1] It is easy to confuse the two terms – evangelism and disciple-making. People often use them as synonyms. Though related, they are not the same. Different definitions of each term could be provided but, for the sake of simplicity, evangelism should be understood as the proclamation of the Good News with a view of allowing a non-believer to hear the gospel and to respond to it. Disciple-making, on the other hand, should be understood as the process through which a new Christian is led on a journey of sanctification, Christ-likeness, and commitment to the cause of Christ. One can look at evangelistic efforts as part of and beginning stages of disciple-making, so that any pre-conversion evangelistic efforts with someone would be considered as part of the disciple-making process. This author prefers to look at evangelism purely in terms of the process of sharing the gospel and leading someone to conversion, while disciple-making as the process that follows by taking a newborn Christian and leading them further in their journey of spiritual growth. In other words, there cannot be disciple-making unless it is preceded by successful evangelism. But to this, the author should add that evangelism without disciple-making often remains fruitless in the long run. So, the two are absolutely interrelated and indispensible to each other. Finally, it is worth noting that disciple-making ultimately leads further to evangelism because when disciples are trained, they in turn become the evangelistic taskforce.

[2] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1987), 46.

[3] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants, Vol. 1* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 2-4. Niehaus rightly points out that God's behavior in the Bible is "always covenantal" and biblical historiography itself is covenantal in nature.

the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Coleman is absolutely right that "theology and evangelism," to which disciple-making could be added, "belong together."[4]

Back To The Roots of Disciple-Making

Any discussion on discipleship and disciple-making comes with the temptation to jump straight to an exploration of the mandate of the Great Commission in the New Testament. That is fully understandable. Matthew's rendering of Jesus' last words before his ascension are so memorable that they have become a landmark for disciple-makers and for the church (Matthew 28:16-20).[5] And rightly so! That is why Jesus' Great Commission will be explored shortly and in great detail. But before that, it would be important to avoid making a premature statement and leave a false impression that disciple-making draws its beginning only from the Great Commission in the gospels or missions from Pentecost.[6]

To look for the origin and principles of disciple-making, one must go back to the beginning where disciple-making is rooted, namely at the creation of the first humans, followed by the so called *cultural mandate* in Genesis 1:26-28. Coleman pinpoints it by writing that "the Great Commission articulated clearly by Jesus… actually originated in the Garden of Eden."[7] There are three main things to note about this historical moment of the birth of humanity and

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[4] Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel: The Theology Behind the Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 9. Coleman cannot be more to the point when he writes that without theology "evangelism loses content." This author believes that this is the exact explanation for the spread of the so called social gospel which, deprived of its proper theological foundations, results in a ministry with a completely distorted focus and loss of eternal relevance.

[5] Not to downplay the other gospel accounts, but Matthew's formulation of the Great Commission seems to be the most comprehensive and it is not surprising that Matthew's version is probably the most widely memorized and referred to.

[6] J.D. Payne, *Theology of Mission: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 10, 19.

[7] J.D. Payne, *Theology of Mission*, 65.

God's marching orders given to Adam and Eve. First, humans are created in God's image, which means that they are to reflect their Creator. Of course, with their laconic nature,[8] the whole creation cycle and these verses in particular leave a lot to wonder about as to the exact implications of the fact of being made in the image and likeness of God. At the same time, these creation details provide enough understanding about the essence of humanity and its calling on earth. It could be asserted that one aspect of that image is related to reflecting God's character.[9]

Second, Adam and Eve received God's covenantal blessing – a token for God's life-sustaining presence with them and an assurance for a bright future as participants in God's covenantal relationship with them. Third, in one of only three pre-fall theophanies recorded in the Old Testament, these verses capture "God's gracious words to his covenant vassals."[10] God articulated to Adam and Eve a covenantal stipulation, i.e. a command to fulfill – to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over" all the living creatures on earth. This is the command that has often been interpreted in purely physical and material terms. To be true to the text, physical procreation and multiplication are certainly in view and part of God's expectation, as well as the institution of the family. But there is more to it.

As part of the original creation, Adam and Eve have a function intrinsic to their position vis-à-vis God and humanity. For one thing, they serve as prophets and covenant mediators of this

[8] Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 85. The laconic nature of the whole creation account and the succeeding chapters of Genesis is truly striking. One would expect that subjects of this magnitude like the origin of the earth, the roots and nature of humanity, etc. would be recounted in as much detail as possible but this is simply not the case. One may say that this is all that God wanted humans to know about these matters. But also another plausible explanation for the laconic style of Genesis 1-3 in particular could be that the ancient Near Eastern reader, being a contemporary or living closer to the time of its writing, understood a lot more and much better the creation dynamics so no further detail was needed.

[9] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 58.

[10] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God At Sinai: Covenant & Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 150.

first covenant, which God establishes with all of humanity.[11] What is more, the Garden of Eden is understood to have been "a sanctuary, a temple-garden"[12] and their job description, revealed in Genesis 2:15, consists of taking care of the Garden with the specific instruction "to work it and keep it" (Heb. לְעָבְדָהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ). It has been demonstrated that these same two verbs are later used to describe the "Levitical service in the Mosaic Tabernacle"[13] (Numbers 4:26-33; Numbers 1:53; 3:25). In both these roles, Adam and Eve are to relate to the generations that will succeed them in more than just a physical way. As covenant mediators, they will convey the knowledge of God to their descendants and will lead them into obedience to the commands of their Creator and God. As workers and keepers of the Garden of Eden, fulfilling a priestly role, Adam and Eve will provide leadership to their descendants in their relationship and service to God. Their combined role is nothing short of disciple-making, and the *cultural mandate* is a command, to use Anthony Hoekema's words, "to rule the earth for God, and to develop a God-glorifying culture."[14] This means that "Adam and Eve would transmit to others their knowledge of the Lord and teach them in turn to do the same."[15] Then, by multiplication, this process will produce disciples of all the inhabitants of the earth.

The original sin brought a thick cloud over the clear path God had designed from the beginning and God's mandate was tarnished by human disobedience. Moreover, all along the *Heilsgeschichte*, God's mission and purposes are constantly neglected or forgotten by God's

[11] Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 21. The Bible reveals six covenants mediated by six covenant mediator prophets as follows: Adam (and Eve), Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus.

[12] Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), 48. See also Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 21-22.

[13] Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 76-77.

[14] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 14.

[15] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 65-66.

chosen people who often blend in with the surrounding world and become a part of it, and so they have "neither a witness nor a sense of mission to their neighbors."[16] However, as Coleman affirms, "God will not be defeated in his purpose in creation and redemption to make a people for his glory."[17] The announcement of the *protoevangelium* (Genesis 3:15) released hope for the future of humanity in the midst of the primordial human tragedy and pronouncement of curses in covenantal judgment (Genesis 3:14-19), a hope that came to actual fulfillment in the incarnation of Jesus and his sacrificial death on the cross. To use the apostle Paul's famous wording in 1 Corinthians 15:45, what the *first Adam* (Gr. ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος Ἀδὰμ), and his successors failed to accomplish, now Jesus, the *last Adam* (Gr. ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ) and "life-giving spirit" has successfully accomplished in his life, ministry, death and resurrection.

Jesus, The Disciple-Maker

There is another temptation to jump all too quickly to the Great Commission itself, and thus miss an essential pillar of disciple-making before the Early Church took on the calling to make disciples. A proper theological understanding of disciple-making would be truncated without a look into the life of Jesus himself and his ministry example. It would not be an overstatement to claim that Jesus, in his life and ministry, embodied disciple-making. The gospel writers graciously provide significant details about Jesus' public ministry endeavors and his interactions with others. Moreover, they also do not fail to make evident and to underline the focus of Jesus' daily ministry, namely the training of the Twelve. This focus is revealed in Jesus' words and deeds throughout his entire ministry and it was time-investing, forward-looking and far-reaching.

[16] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 12-13.

[17] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 66.

One of the most noteworthy details in the gospel accounts could be easily overlooked, namely that "remarkable as it may seem, Jesus started to gather… men before he ever organized an evangelistic campaign or even preached a sermon in public."[18] The calling of the first disciples appropriately finds its place in the Synoptics as well as in John's gospel.[19] Jesus' first ministry steps "revealed immediately the direction his evangelistic strategy would take."[20] Jesus knew that his mission on the cross would accomplish the redemption of a fallen world but that it would take nothing less than the training of people "whom the multitudes would follow"[21] to accomplish the proclamation of that redemption. And to this end, he committed his ministry energy. Jesus did not shy away from ministering to the crowds but, with great determination, he focused his ministry on the small group of followers whom he would later appoint as his apostles (Mark 3:13-19). In the words of Coleman, "men were his method of winning the world to

[18] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 21.

[19] Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Timeless Principles for Leadership Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988), 1-40. In the first four chapters of his book, Bruce provides an excellent study on the calling of the Twelve. He points out that the twelve disciples became a part of the group gradually. The calling of the two pairs of brothers (Peter and Andrew, James and John) is recounted as a single event in the parallel passages in Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20 and Luke 5:1-11 with Matthew following closely Mark, while Luke revealing additional details about the incident. The calling of Matthew is also paralleled in Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17 and Luke 5:27-32 with the three accounts reporting the event almost identically with the interesting difference that Mark and Luke refer to the apostle by his name Levi. Two further comments are necessary. First, the identity of the other disciples is rather obscure and little or nothing is known about their calling by Jesus. They first appear as chosen by Jesus along with the first ones in the lists the Synoptic gospel writers insert in their narratives as follows: Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16 and Acts 1:13. Second, Bruce makes a significant observation about the incident reported in John 1:29-51 of the pre-calling encounter of Jesus with Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathanael and an unnamed disciple (presumably John, the Gospel writer himself) at John the Baptist's water baptism. It is surprising that all three synoptic evangelists are silent on this event. What is even more surprising is that John includes this event after so many years have passed and the other three gospels had already been written a few decades earlier. But, finally Bruce notes another fact that is way too relevant to this section of the present thesis to be skipped. He wonders about the fact that John includes an incident "so minute, especially in such close proximity to the sublime sentences with which his Gospel begins" A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 1-2. The importance of the calling of the Twelve as an essential step in the ministry of Jesus simply cannot be overlooked.

[20] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

[21] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

God."[22] Jesus looked forward and invested most of his time, pouring into the small group of his closest followers in order to prepare them in turn to do the same with others. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that "he literally staked his whole ministry on them."[23] Day after day, they learned Jesus' theological take on life, meaning, calling, ministry, and the kingdom of God. They began assisting Jesus in his kingdom work and ended up replicating his ministry after his death, resurrection and ascension. To use A.B. Bruce's excellent evaluation:

> From the time of their being chosen, indeed, the twelve entered on a regular apprenticeship for the great office of apostleship, in the course of which they were to learn, in the privacy of an intimate daily fellowship with their Master, what they should be, do, believe, and teach, as His witnesses and ambassadors to the world. Henceforth the training of these men was to be a constant and prominent part of Christ's personal work.[24]

The whole ministry of Jesus was focused on training the Twelve, so important it was for him to prepare them for the mission at hand. Jesus' focus on disciple-making throughout his whole public ministry ultimately and naturally culminated in the Great Commission,[25] which also serves as a thematic summary of Matthew's gospel.[26] So, he first demonstrated to his closest followers his own commitment to their training as his disciples and then he outlined for them the essential focus for their future and for the ministry of the Church then and now.

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[22] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

[23] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 25.

[24] Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 30.

[25] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 160. Clowney rightly notes that the Great Commission marks the climax of the whole Gospel of Matthew.

[26] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 239.

Matthew 28:16-20

> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Last words matter! They are often some of the most memorable ones, which a person leaves behind. In Matthew 28:16-20, the gospel writer captures one last interaction of Jesus with his disciples, which serves as the closing lines of Matthew's gospel account. The words of Jesus in this interaction have given "marching orders to the Church"[27] not only in terms of pragmatic instruction. Even more importantly, they represent a foundational theological understanding of disciple-making and of training disciple-makers among all nations, including ethnic groups and often disregarded minorities. The four gospel writers include the commissioning of the disciples, "though each states it from his own unique perspective."[28] Matthew's record of the Great Commission "in some degree embraces the thrust of the other three."[29] At such a pivotal moment in all of human history, one may expect a much longer and detailed address on the part of Jesus. Instead, "the business-like brevity and matter-of-factness tone" seem to fit the occasion and

[27] Robert E. Coleman in his Foreword to Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 23.

[28] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 15. The parallel passages can be found in the other two Synoptics and in John's gospel. Mark 16:15 is part of the infamous ending of the Mark's gospel and most probably not part of the original text. Yet, even if the section was later added, it is interesting that of all things that a later scribe could have included, as the other gospel writers, he emphasized Jesus' commissioning of the disciples. Luke's record is found in Luke 24:47-53 and could be read in conjunction with Luke's further record in Acts 1:1-8, the combined instruction emphasizing the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins as well as witnessing starting in Jerusalem and expanding to the ends of the earth. Finally, John 20:21 emphasizes the missional aspect of the commission and Jesus sending the disciples out just like he himself has been sent by his Father.

[29] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 19.

anything "savoring of sentimentality would have been beneath the dignity of the situation."[30] Nevertheless, the brevity of the Great Commission is compensated for by its richness and depth!

The commissioning of the disciples is interestingly positioned geographically. Matthew carefully reveals how after his triumph in Jerusalem, Jesus, the Galilean, returns to his home district, where he originally launched his mission as if to indicate both a continuation and a re-launch of the original mission Jesus expanded in Galilee.[31] The eleven disciples[32] encounter the glorified Jesus one more time at the mountain to which (Gr. οὗ) Jesus directed them for the appointed meeting (Matthew 28:16). Their reaction to the appearance of Jesus in their midst is one of awe and confusion. The disciples are understandably overwhelmed in the presence of their risen Lord. As soon as they see him, they fall down before him in an act of worship (Gr. προσεκύνησαν). As used in the New Testament, the object of this verb[33] is "always something – truly or supposedly – divine."[34] Matthew uses it thirteen times but, in the few times that it is used

[30] Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 533.

[31] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1107.

[32] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 132. Bauckham reminds his readers that Matthew (the believed gospel writer), even though not specifically distinguished in his gospel or at this point of the gospel account, is also present along the other ten disciples at the moment of Jesus appearance and final words. Among the four gospel writers, Matthew is one of the two direct eyewitnesses who have later written a gospel account.

[33] The verb προσκυνέω literally means "to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship… prostrate oneself before." Walter Bauer, Fredetick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, London, 1999), 882-883.

[34] Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. VI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 763.

about the disciples with reference to Jesus, it is "especially motivated by dawning recognition of the divine sonship or an appearance of the risen Lord."[35]

The presence of the risen Savior evokes another reaction as well. Some of the disciples display inadequacy or hesitation (Gr. ἐδίστασαν). Traditionally, this reaction has been understood as an expression of doubt.[36] However, the Greek verb in this case should be probably understood not so much as intellectual uncertainty but as disorientation and uncertainty about how to react[37] vis-à-vis an unfamiliar or overwhelming situation.[38] In any case, the contrast between worship and doubt is not weakened if the mixed reaction of the disciples is in fact one of falling down before Jesus while some of them are overwhelmed and experience confusion. Matthew's truthful account of the situation only adds to its authenticity and allows the reader to easily identify with the first disciples.[39] If taken into account, the disciples' mixed reaction can speak powerfully to the church today in its worshiping stance toward God but also in its apprehension and uncertainty about the future, about its mission, and about the task of the Great Commission.

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[35] Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. VI, 764. For comparison, Mark only uses the verb twice while Luke-Acts – a total of seven times. Matthew 14:33 is another important occurrence where the disciples worship Jesus along with a recognition of his divine sonship.

[36] Matthew 14:31-33 presents a parallel to this verse with a combination of the same verbs for Peter's doubt and the disciples' worship. But in this case, Peter's doubt is paired and fully in line also with Jesus' calling him ὀλιγόπιστος - "of little faith." In fact, Matthew 14:31 is the only other New Testament occurrence of the verb διστάζω.

[37] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 314, esp. n. 83.

[38] Walter Bauer, Fredetick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.* 3rd ed. BDAG (University of Chicago Press, London, 1999), 252.

[39] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 30, n. 2.

All Authority Has Been Given To Me (Matthew 28:18)

The disciples' worshiping stance is fully in line not only with their recognition of Jesus but also with the beginning of Jesus' address to them.[40] Before outlining a plan for action, Jesus starts with a declaration about the authority he has been given. This is certainly the most overlooked part of the Great Commission.[41] In fact, it is often omitted from the mandate in quotations and in preaching and teaching.[42] Unfortunately, to its own detriment, "this is what the church forgets."[43] But without it, the Great Commission and any ministry of the church would be stripped of its underlying authority and would be lacking the driving force for its eternal purpose.

"All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth" (my translation) is a statement, which sums up "the impression which has been increasingly conveyed throughout the gospel."[44] R.T France is correct when he notes that "the authority of Jesus is clearly a central theme of Matthew's portrait."[45] The reader of the gospel gradually discovers Jesus' authority displayed throughout the narrative[46] before it finds its climax in the Great Commission. Two

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[40] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 179.

[41] Arthur F. Glasser, *"My Last Conversation with Donald McGavran" in Evangelical Missions Quarterly 27*, no. 1 (January 1991), 59. Glasser reports on his conversation with Donald McGavran and their reflection on the Great Commission. He agreed with McGavran that "the part of the Great Commission most frequently overlooked was the full significance of Jesus' triumphant affirmation: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

[42] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 23-24.

[43] Arthur F. Glasser, *"My Last Conversation with Donald McGavran"*, 59.

[44] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 307.

[45] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 307.

[46] E.g., Matthew 8-9 presents a whole series of miraculous deeds and exorcism that demonstrate the authority of Jesus over various physical sicknesses, over nature, over demonic powers, and over death itself. Jesus is greater than the Temple and he is the Lord of the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8). He has authority and power over natural human limitations (e.g. Feeding of the 5,000 and of the 4,000 – Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39). And last but not least, Jesus has the authority to forgive sins (Matthew 9:1-8).

preceding passages specifically relate to Jesus' final pronouncement in Matthew 28:18. First, the declaration here "forms a kind of antithesis to the temptation of Jesus"[47] in the wilderness and its climax in Matthew 4:8-10.[48] The final challenge before Jesus is to claim authority and power over this world by falling down and worshipping the devil (Gr. ἐὰν πεσὼν προσκυνήσῃς μοι). Then, in Matthew 11:27, Jesus declared that "all things have been handed over to me by my Father" (Gr. Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη) which was already an even more explicit statement about Jesus' "unique relationship with God, but also a unique status of authority" in anticipation of "the ringing declaration of 28:18."[49]

Scholars have recognized that Jesus' declaration of received authority echoes Daniel 7:14.[50] It is hard to miss the thrust of Daniel's prophecy about a "dominion and glory and a kingdom" being given to "one like a son of man"[51] and its portrayal of a "kingship which is to be everlasting and indestructible."[52] Further, the parallels in the mission to all the nations and the

[47] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 179.

[48] Graham H. Twelftree, *"Temptation of Jesus"* in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 823.

[49] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 297, 309.

[50] Craig L. Blomberg, *"Matthew"* in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 100.

[51] C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Daniel, vol. 9* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 645-647. Daniel 7:13-14 presents an exegetical challenge when it comes to identifying the person of the "one like a son of man." Scholars suggest that it could refer to the people of God as a nation (cf. Daniel 7:18) or to the Messiah himself coming in the clouds of heaven. Keil and Delitzsch review the evidence and favor an interpretation of the "one like a son of man" as a heavenly or divine being in a human form, pointing to the Messiah. R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 208-209. R.T. France concludes that the person in question is "one who is in some sense a corporate figure" and refers to C.H. Dodd's conclusion that the Messiah is in fact the new people of God as its "inclusive representative." So, the "one like a son of man" could be understood as "the true Israel."

[52] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1102.

totality of peoples who are to serve him are also remarkable. All of this reminds of "Jesus' powerful presence until the end of the age"[53] and in the *parousia*.

An all important feature of Jesus' declaration is its magnitude. Jesus speaks of nothing less than *all* authority (Gr. πᾶσα ἐξουσία) being given to him. Linguistically, this *all*-ness will appear three more times in the Great Commission, which should be understood as being far from accidental but rather as pointing to the "comprehensive nature to what Jesus shares with the disciples."[54]

The endowment of Jesus "with all authority in heaven and on earth is in fact a *fait accompli*."[55] So, the question for the church today vis-à-vis the Great Commission should be not in terms of whether Jesus' command could be accomplished or not. The declaration of Jesus about *all authority* belonging to him is a sure foundation that the Great Commission is not only possible[56] but its fulfillment is guaranteed by God himself and it is only a matter of time. After all, the Great Commission is founded not on the Church but on Christ himself.[57] This is "the secret of the Great Commission. It is finally God's work, not ours. We are merely the channel through which the Spirit of Christ makes disciples."[58] The disciples of Jesus are authorized, enabled and empowered to go out and fulfill his command "as his agents."[59] This should invite

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[53] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1102.

[54] J.D. Payne, *Theology of Mission*, 83.

[55] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants: New Testament, Vol. 3* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 302.

[56] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 31. Coleman righty points out that the Book of Acts itself "makes clear that bringing the Gospel to every creature is God's program, and it can be accomplished."

[57] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 126.

[58] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 132.

[59] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 1062. Of course the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the actual empowerment of the disciples for action is anticipated (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).

the local church to humility with regards to its ministry position as a servant of God and an instrument of his mission to the world. At the same time, this fact should also embolden the local church to pursue the fulfillment of the Great Commission as its central focus, without hesitation but in trustful obedience. Clowney summarizes well the implications of Jesus' declaration in Matthew 28:18:

> This fallen, broken world is now Christ's world. It is the theater of his redemption, the place of his mission, over which he has total authority for the accomplishment of his saving work. The rule of Christ will bring this present world to the glory of the world to come.[60]

Therefore (Matthew 28:19)

A reader often skips little words and focuses on what appear to be the more essential ones. However, little words often form bridges without which the meaning of a passage could be impaired or lost. The Great Commission continues with one such little word, which in this context serves not only as a linguistic bridge but also as a semantic transition to what follows. "Therefore" (Gr. οὖν)[61] serves as a link for Matthew to assure his readers that the declaration is what enables the following commission.[62] And what follows is not a recommendation on Jesus' part. Timothy Beougher points out that "these verses do not contain the Great Suggestion, but the Great Commission. Evangelism is an essential part of God's plan to save people."[63] The church can execute God's plan by being obedient to its calling to make disciples and the Great Commission becomes its *modus operandi*.

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[60] Clowney, *The Church*, 172.

[61] As a postpositive, the word is rightly placed second in the Greek text but also correctly and necessarily placed first in English translations as to convey the force of the connection made between what has been just said and what follows.

[62] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 78.

[63] Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 50.

Make disciples (Matthew 28:19)

The original Greek language of the text contributes to a better understanding of the actual command of Jesus, its scope, and its implications. The whole enterprise in Matthew 28:19-20 is conveyed by the use of four action grammatical forms, one of which is the main verb and the other three are participles. The main verb obviously carries the main thrust of the mandate while the participles denote subordinate actions. "Make disciples" (Gr. μαθητεύσατε)[64] in the imperative is that main verb which guides and drives the rest. The church has often fallen prey to the misconception that its primary calling is to save people and to make converts. Conversion is critical for one to be able to enter the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:3; John 3:1-21, esp. 3-8) but it is only the entrance point, which is the launching pad for the journey of discipleship. And to this journey Jesus calls his disciples as his followers *and* as disciple-makers – this is the essence of the Great Commission and its ultimate objective.[65] France makes an important observation that the mandate is "expressed not in terms of means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to "make disciples."[66] Hearing the message of the gospel is but the invitation to a "wholehearted commitment which was required of those who became disciples of Jesus during his ministry."[67] The replication of the process of disciple-making will achieve the ultimate goal of evangelism – to bring the world to the feet of Christ.

[64] In the original Greek language "make disciples" is a single word which implies both the "making" and the "disciples." This creates a slight difficulty for proper translation. "Make/create/train disciples" would be all possible ways to render the Greek meaning but, in many languages, there is no single word to translate the one-word notion from Greek. As a verb μαθητεύω means "to be a pupil" or "to make one be a pupil" which is clearly the meaning in Matthew 28:19. BDAG, 609.

[65] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 218.

[66] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115.

[67] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115.

A Dual Scope – Of All Nations and All Believers (Matthew 28:19)

The Great Commission qualifies disciple-making in terms of its scope – "make disciples of all nations" (Gr. πάντα τὰ ἔθνη).[68] This is not an unimportant detail. In fact, these words of Jesus have significant theological implications. Matthew carefully structures his gospel account and includes hints to the universal mission explicitly introduced here in Matthew 28:19.[69] Israel has had the opportunity to hear the gospel message and to respond to it by receiving or rejecting it.[70] Jesus' initial mission, primarily addressed to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6, 15:24) will have a wider scope. Now, the followers of Jesus will extend the gospel to all the nations and "the kingdom of heaven is to be established over all the earth."[71] France summarizes it nicely: "The post-Eastern mission of 28:18-20 breathes a different atmosphere from the restricted mission of 10:5-6 and 15:24."[72] Those, who "were previously exceptions are now the focus"[73] but the way in which Jesus defines the scope for the mission at hand in no way excludes the Jews themselves[74] and the Jews are within the Christian missionary perspective.[75]

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[68] The Greek ἔθνος in the singular means "a body of persons united by kinship, culture, and common traditions," i.e. "nation, people." In its plural use in the New Testament, τὰ ἔθνη refers to peoples and nations that are different from the Israelites or from Israelite Christians, often translated as "gentiles" but really referring to peoples / nations. BDAG, 276-277.

[69] George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 226. Ladd provides a list of Matthew's references to the place of Gentiles in God's mission and the universal reach of the gospel: "Gentile" women in Jesus' genealogy (1:3-6), the magi from the east (2:1-12), the Gentile centurion (8:5-13), the Canaanite woman (15:21-28), the "other nation" of 21:43, the guests from the streets (22:8-9), the future universal preaching of the gospel (24:14; 26:13).

[70] Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus*, 230.

[71] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1108.

[72] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 199.

[73] Scot McKnight, *"Gospel of Matthew"* in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 535.

[74] D.A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 46-47. Carson discusses the exegetical fallacy of "unjustified adoption of a too restrictive *terminus technicus*" and illustrates how πάντα τὰ ἔθνη in Matthew 28:19 could be mistakenly interpreted as referring only to the nations in the world at the exclusion

The scope of the Great Commission has another aspect to it, which should not be overlooked. Jesus spoke his command to the disciples *as a group*, representing the whole church. Disciple-making is not a calling and privilege of a few. Every Christ-follower is bound to fulfill the Great Commission. Coleman's assessment is straightforward when he writes, that "making disciples is not a special gift or calling; it is a lifestyle of obedience incumbent on the whole body of Christ, the church."[76]

Go (Matthew 28:19)

Often the local church has "subtly reversed the Great Commission; instead of "go and tell," it has become "come and hear."[77] However, the Great Commission has an all-inclusive character and it represents a switch from a "centripetal approach to the nations coming to Jerusalem… to a centrifugal operation moving away from Jerusalem."[78] The Greek attendant circumstance participle πορευθέντες derives its mood from the main verb (Gr. μαθητεύσατε) which carries the greater emphasis. But the participle is like a "prerequisite before the action of the main verb can occur."[79] "Go" to all the nations becomes a "necessary condition of obeying

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of Israel. Carson's conclusion points in the direction that Israel is not excluded but is in fact part of the scope of the Great Commission.

[75] R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, 236.

[76] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 11.

[77] Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 12.

[78] J.D. Payne, *Theology of Mission*, 83.

[79] Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 642-643. Here the text follows the pattern of an aorist participle + aorist imperative construction and Wallace points out that this attendant circumstance participle raises serious doubt about translations of πορευθέντες as "having gone" or even worse as "as you are going."

the primary command."[80] While the main calling of the Great Commission is established as well as its scope, the following two instructions clarify the means by which the mandate will be fulfilled.

Baptizing them (Matthew 28:19)

The Greek participle of means[81] βαπτίζοντες introduces water baptism as one of the ways in which the Great Commission is to be carried out. Baptism is a sign of the New Covenant so its part in discipleship and disciple-making is understandable. It illustrates the Christian's union with Christ in his burial and resurrection and it symbolizes the disciple's new life (Romans 6:1-6) and commitment to follow Christ.[82] In addition, Sinclair Ferguson clarifies that baptism is first and foremost a sign and seal of grace, of divine activity in Christ, and of the riches of his provision for us."[83]

The order in which baptism is listed in the Great Commission, preceding "teaching" (Gr. διδάσκοντες) seems to have escaped the attention and practices of many a church today. Baptism is often perceived as some sort of culmination of Christian growth and readiness to follow the Savior. But in Jesus' order, baptism is "the point of enrollment into a process of learning which is never complete."[84]

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[80] Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 34-35.

[81] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 630. Both βαπτίζοντες and the following διδάσκοντες in Matthew 28:20 are adverbial participles of means, so clarifying the means by which the action of the main verb will be accomplished.

[82] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1110.

[83] Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 198.

[84] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115-16. France offers a helpful observation of the practice in many churches today of treating people in two categories – the baptized and those who are not ready yet.

The instruction to baptize disciples in the process of disciple-making features one of the few New Testament explicit Trinitarian formulas[85] – "in/into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Gr. εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος). It should be noted that this formula links the three persons of the Trinity in a single "name" (Gr. τὸ ὄνομα).[86] The Trinitarian instruction of Jesus echoes an earlier incident at the baptism of Jesus himself, recorded in all four gospels[87] when Jesus is present in the baptismal waters of the Jordan River, the Holy Spirit descends on him in an avian theophany, and the voice (of the Father) from heaven proclaims Jesus as his beloved Son.[88] The Trinitarian formula in Matthew 28:19 is significant in that it includes Jesus as the glorified Son and a second person of the Trinity as well as the Holy Spirit as equal to the Father and the Son, all three persons operating in unanimity in the commissioning of the disciples for their mission ahead.[89]

Teaching them (Matthew 28:20)

Baptism is the not the end goal of the Great Commission. It is followed by a life-long journey of learning and spiritual growth. In this process, an indispensible role plays a final portion of Jesus' instruction about "teaching" in disciple-making. Baptism and teaching are joined as partners in the disciple-making process.[90] "Teaching" (Gr. διδάσκοντες) is another

[85] Other instances are found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-5; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 1:2; Revelation 1:4-5.

[86] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1108.

[87] Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; John 1:32-34.

[88] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 144.

[89] Keith Warrington, *"The Synoptic Gospels"* in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington, eds. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 85.

[90] David S. Dockery, *"Baptism"* in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 58.

adverbial participle of means, i.e. it denotes by what means the Great Commission will be accomplished. Teaching disciples to keep all that Jesus has commanded (Gr. τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν) is the essence of a journey of growth to "full maturity in Christ," which will result in disciples who multiply by replicating the process.[91]

There are two things to consider here. First, Jesus does not leave the apostles wondering about what they are to instill in the disciples to be trained. Jesus gives them, to use Hull's observation, "both a command and a curriculum."[92] Hull also notes that Jesus "commanded 212 things," which provides "a very rich curriculum."[93] Second, Jesus does not leave his apostles wondering about the goal of their teaching and the expected end result. Teaching the commands of Jesus is not for the sake of mere knowledge and intellectual growth. The disciples in training will be taught *to obey* (Gr. τηρεῖν) Jesus' commands. This is not a random expectation. In John 14:15, using purely covenantal terminology[94], Jesus said to his disciples earlier: "If you love me, you will keep[95] my commandments." Nothing less than obedience to Jesus' teaching will be taught and required from the disciples in training. Truly, "to be a disciple is to obey Jesus' teaching."[96] Later, the apostle Paul, reveals what such obedience would produce when he underlines his concern for the believers in Galatia and beautifully articulates his deep desire for them that Christ would be "*formed*" in them (Galatians 4:19). Clowney is right that in its essence

[91] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 51. Chan's helpful definition of a disciple emphasizes this process of developing a believer to "full maturity in Christ."

[92] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 270.

[93] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 270.

[94] In suzerain-vassal treaties, the suzerain would use exactly such terminology to require obedience from his vassals. The same covenantal attitude would be seen in Jesus' words in John 15:14: "You are my friends if you do what I command you."

[95] The same verb τηρέω is used here meaning to "keep/observe."

[96] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1119.

the church is "apostolic because it is founded on apostolic teaching, and also because of its charge to carry out the Great Commission."[97] This completes the plan of action for the disciples. But Jesus' last words are followed by a promise that is far from being a formality.

I am with you always (Matthew 28:20)

Jesus makes a pledge to the disciples to be with them always, literally "all the days" (Gr. πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας).[98] The Greek expression is an accusative for extent of time, which points to the idea of a whole length of duration.[99] This presence is extended for the full length "to the end of the age" (Gr. ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος), literally "until the completion of the age."

The gospel story has come full circle. It began with the birth of the Son of God who was identified as "Immanuel" – "God with us" (Matthew 1:23) and now concludes with the Son of God's assurance to be with his disciples.[100] As a covenant mediator, after the covenant institution (Matthew 26-27), Jesus establishes his ongoing presence among his people.[101] His promise to be with the disciples, especially in light of his ascension, certainly has the force to comfort them that they will not remain alone. However, Jesus powerful assurance is pronounced in light of the mandate Jesus has just articulated to them. In fact, the earlier declaration about all authority having been given to him and these last words form *an inclusio* with important theological implications. On the basis of Jesus' authority, the disciples can launch their disciple-making

[97] Clowney, *The Church*, 77.

[98] Here is the last of four occurrences of "all" in the Great Commission. While other languages may allow for a more literal translation as "all the days," a smoother English translation requires one to resort to "always" which, while less literal, still carries the essential meaning of the original expression.

[99] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 201-203.

[100] George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 221.

[101] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants: New Testament, Vol. 3*, 19.

efforts. On the basis of his promised presence they can be sure that they will have the empowerment to fulfill the mandate and that their efforts will never fall short of succeeding. In that sense, these last words of Jesus were not a general promise that God will be with them. Nor were they a promise about some future moment in history on earth or in heaven either. They were "the assurance of the present reality they [the disciples] were to experience while going forth to make disciples."[102] This reality will become much more palpable only in a short while later when the Holy Spirit will come to dwell in the disciples and to empower them for the mission road ahead (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).

It Is All In The Obedience

The Great Commission is an imperative! It would not be an overstatement that if Christ-followers and the organized church ignore or neglect Jesus' mandate to make disciples, they are being disobedient to God and to his calling. Unfortunately, this is the case in many churches today all over the world, in Bulgaria, and in the Bulgarian Gypsy community in particular.

The Son of God remained obedient to the Father until the end and the Father gave him "all authority in heaven and on earth."[103] Jesus modeled obedience for his disciples and nothing less than obedience is required of them. For Christ-followers, the level of commitment to the Great Commission becomes a measurement of obedience to God himself. This also means that the "lack of passion for the Great Commission" is a symptom of "a lack of character" and spiritual depth.[104]

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[102] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 138.

[103] David R. Bauer, *"Son of God"* in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 774.

[104] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 233.

In Jesus' well-known assessment, whoever does not gather with him scatters (Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23). Any local church must face an honest evaluation of its obedience to the mission call from God, lest it be found scattering. Mission can hardly be "an optional activity for Christ's disciples. If they are not gatherers, they are scatterers."[105] Yet, the disciples of Jesus and the church today, are "sent in his name with his message and his authority."[106] Making disciples is "a lifestyle of obedience incumbent on the whole body of Christ, the church."[107]

In conclusion, A.B. Bruce's contemplation of the essence and magnitude of the Great Commission and the missionary enterprise is perfectly fitting: "What mere man ever entertained a plan of beneficence embracing the whole human race within its scope? And who but one possessing all power in heaven and on earth could dare to hope for success in so gigantic an undertaking? Then how full of grace and love the matter of the commission!"[108]

It Is All In The Relationship

The command of Jesus to make disciples inevitably involves interaction between people. At its core, disciple-making is not a transactional but rather a *relational* exchange.[109] In recent decades, the Christian community seems to be returning to the idea of and need for relationships and their importance in the life and the mission of the church.

The idea of relationship is not new. Relationship is at the core of God's own eternal existence within the Trinity, of God's revelation, and of his way of communicating with his

[105] Clowney, *The Church*, 159.

[106] Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 25.

[107] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 11.

[108] Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, 535.

[109] Disciple-making is not about mere transfer of biblical knowledge and theological information. It is a relationship-based life-on-life process.

creation. And it is also the foundational block for disciple-making, without which the fulfillment of the Great Commission would be a complete chimera.

The Perichoretic Dance

The most fundamental tenet and distinctive feature of the Jewish and Christian faith is the fact that God is One.[110] Throughout the pages of Scripture this claim is stated and reaffirmed as to be instilled as a lasting conviction.[111] Along with this, the Bible reveals God as triune – a big theological conundrum, which is not easy to appropriate.[112] Moreover, the relationship within the Godhead reveals an aspect of God's inherent nature that is crucial to a theological understanding of the origins and nature of relationship altogether.[113]

George Cladis points to John of Damascus who, in the seventh century AD, described the relationships within the Godhead by using the term "perichoresis."[114] The Greek word[115] refers

[110] Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

[111] Cf. Exodus 20:2-3; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 32:39; 2 Samuel 7:22; 1 Kings 8:60; Isaiah 64:9; Mark 12:29-34; Galatians 3:20; 1 Timothy 2:5; James 2:19. Any polytheistic and syncretistic human inclinations are condemned as idolatry and betrayal of the covenant with God, the only One worthy of honor and adoration. In fact, idolatry is one of the main sins for which the Jewish nation in Old Testament times often fell under God's judgment. Cf. Exodus 20:3-6; Exodus 32-33 (The Golden Calf – a real paradigm of idolatry); 1 Kings 17-18; Jeremiah 1:16; Psalm 78:58; 1 Corinthians 10:14; 1 John 5:21.

[112] Evidence could be discussed from the Old Testament and the New Testament but most of the more explicit textual evidence is to be found in the New Testament. A clearer Trinitarian understanding of God was developed by the early church on the basis of the new historical reality which the coming of Jesus and the day of Pentecost inaugurated. A concise but helpful review including historical development could be found in Gerald Brey, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 111-151.

[113] The focus in the study of the Trinity is usually on the three persons of God and their specific roles in Creation, human history, and salvation as well as on clarifying their substance, co-existence, and co-equality. Less attention seems to be given to the relationship within the inner circle of the Trinity.

[114] George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staff Can Grow Together into a powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 4. Cladis explores the perichoretic image of the Trinity in his search for biblical foundations for leadership and team-based ministry, which are obviously based on the foundation of relationships.

[115] The original term is used to refer to the co-inherence of the three persons of the Trinity. In Brey's description, it means that each of the hypostases is "a complete manifestation of the divine essence" and that "to see

to a "circle dance" and could be used to conceptualize the nature of the relationship within the Godhead as a "constant movement in a circle that implies intimacy, equality, unity yet distinction, and love."[116] As Shirley Guthrie points out, "the oneness of God is not the oneness of a distinct, self-contained individual; it is the unity of a *community* of persons who love each other and live together in harmony."[117] It is this kind of relationship that reveals God not only as an existing being but as a *relational* being. This essential attribute of God provides at least one big reason for him to want to get involved in creation and in revelation of himself and to delight in all of it.

Divine Revelation

Revelation is a *relational* transaction and God's revelation of himself is *for the purpose* of relationship. The creation of Adam and Eve is nothing less than God stretching out his hand of relationship to his creatures and a reflection of his relational being outside of the perichoretic circle of his own existence.[118] Furthermore, relationship becomes the fundamental transactional reality of all existence. God's relationship with the first humans is further reflected in their relationship between themselves and a model for the existence of the family and the society as a whole.[119] Being relational is part of the *imago Dei*.[120] Relationship also becomes the foundation

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God is to see all three at once, not one after the other in ascending order of succession." Brey insists that this doctrine of co-inherence is probably "the most important single teaching of the Bible" in the contemporary historical and cultural context in which we live. Brey, *The Doctrine of God*, 158, 242.

[116] Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church,* 4.

[117] Shirley C. Guthrie Jr., *Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 92.

[118] The heavenly beings (angels, archangels, seraphim) are also God's creation and stand in a relationship with God.

[119] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *"An Idea in the Mind of God"* in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52/2 (2009): 228.

for and the means through which the knowledge of God and his revelation were designed to spread to all humans, a process which, to use Jeffrey Niehaus's words, could be described as an "administration of his [God's] kingdom on earth."[121] This same foundation is the basis of evangelism and disciple-making because relationship is a reflection of God himself and of the way God has created humanity to exist, to function, to relate to him, and to be redeemed to God.[122]

Relationship Through Covenant[123]

The Bible introduces God as a Great King.[124] As a suzerain, he enters into relationship with his vassal-subjects by way of making a covenant with them.[125] The biblical narrative reveals

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[120] The question of the *imago Dei* has rightly deserved a lot of scholarly ink. Jeffrey J. Niehaus suggests that the *imago Dei* includes at least two major aspects. First, the functional aspect is expressed in the fact that the first humans "partake of God's royal nature, and are to rule over the earth under the authority of the God who has commanded them to do so" (cf. Genesis 1:28). Second, Adam and Eve "hear from God and receive instructions from him about the administration of his kingdom on earth." The latter typically characterizes the person of the prophet and of the prophetic office. So, the second functional aspect could be described as referring to the first humans' prophetic role. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 52-64. If follows that both aspects of the *imago Dei* advanced by Niehaus are clearly *relational* in their nature as both ruling and the prophetic office imply interaction with all of creation and with other humans in particular.

[121] Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 63.

[122] Many evangelistic presentations wrongly emphasize only turning *away from sin* and *going to heaven* and thus neglect the *relationship* God wants to have with a redeemed person. This also precludes the idea of discipleship. Yet, as Allan Coppedge points out, the most fundamental biblical categories describing our redemption, conversion, re-connection with God in Christ have a common denominator, namely the relationship of the individual believer and the corporate body of believers with God and with one another. The concept of person-to-person relationships pervades the whole discussion of salvation and its different biblical aspects: reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-21), adoption (Galatians 4:5-7; cf. Romans 8:9-17), receiving Christ (John 1:12; Revelation 3:20; Matthew 10:40), fellowship (1 John 1:3; 1 Corinthians 1:9), having the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9; 1 Corinthians 2:12), inhabitation (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; cf. 6:19; Ephesians 2:22), being in Christ (Ephesians 1:1, 3-5, 7, 9, 12-13, 15, 20; 2:6-7, 10, 13, 15, 21-22), marriage (Isaiah 54:5; 2 Corinthians 11:2). Allan Coppedge, "A Trinitarian View of Salvation," in *Fulfilling the Great Commission in the Twenty-First Century: Essays On Revival, Evangelism, and Discipleship in Honor of Dr. Robert E. Coleman,* eds. Lyle Dorsett and Ajith Fernando (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), 152.

[123] Scott W. Hahn provides helpful observations on some of the attempts at defining a covenant. Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 1-9. Gordon Hugenberger's definition seems to stress well the essence of a covenant being a form of relationship: "a covenant is an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation, established under divine sanction." Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994), 215.

the unfolding of human history through the succession of covenants God establishes with humans from Creation to the coming of the Messiah. It all starts in the beginning with God's initial reach to humanity in the act of creation itself and in the subsequent relationship God establishes with the first humans and their heirs. Then the story unfolds through the breaking of the covenant and God's judgment on Adam and Eve until the unprecedented Flood and re-creation of all things, followed by the development of God's salvific plan through the subsequent covenants until the New Covenant, inaugurated by the coming of Christ.

The first two covenants (Adamic and Noahic) could rightly be defined as *common grace* covenants as to their scope and role in history.[126] The four succeeding covenants (Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenant) could be described as *special grace* covenants as their focus is clearly on particular individuals and groups out of all humanity.[127] The common denominator in the driving force behind all divine-human covenants is the goal of establishing or restoring of a relationship. Just as God's revelation is *for the purpose* of relationship, God

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[124] Cf. Genesis 1:1. The Ancient Near Eastern reader would have picked up this claim immediately. The God who creates is the Chief of all gods and is considered as the Great King. Although not presented explicitly as King, God is introduced as the Creator and Great King much like in a typical Ancient Near Eastern covenant document introducing in its preamble the Suzerain who is the one establishing a covenant with his vassal(s) (e.g., Psalm 47:3, 48:2, 95:3; Matthew 5:35). The "King" terminology as referring to God (e.g., Deuteronomy 33:2-5; 1 Samuel 12:12; Psalm 5:2, 10:16, 24:8-10, 29:10), "kingdom" as referring to his rule (e.g., Psalm 103:19; Psalm 22:28; Obadiah 21) and "to be king" as referring to his action of ruling (e.g., Exodus 15:18) are abundantly used throughout the whole Bible.

[125] In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word בְּרִית, used 286 times, is the primary term for covenant.[125] In combinations with the verb כָּרַת, it indicates the making of a covenant (literally "to cut a covenant") probably reflecting the ritual which was often involved in the process i.e. the cutting of animals as a pronouncement of a self-maledictory oath (e.g. Genesis 15). The New Testament Greek term for covenant διαθήκη is used over 30 times.

[126] The first two covenants are common grace covenants because they are established by God's grace with all of humanity. Cf. Genesis 1-2; 9:1-17.

[127] Abrahamic covenant – Genesis 15; Mosaic covenant – Exodus 20-24; Davidic covenant – 2 Samuel 7:1-17. The establishment of the New Covenant is not conveyed in a single text. The passages relating the story of the Last Supper are proleptic as they foreshadow the crucifixion, the actual "cutting" of the covenant (cf. Luke 22 and parallels).

establishes covenants with humans *for the purpose* of relationship as well and "God's behavior, according to the Bible, is always covenantal – that is, God has always chosen to relate to humanity through various covenants he has ordained."[128] In that sense, a covenant is a fundamental biblical concept that, in the words of Williamson, "looms large at important junctures throughout the Bible" and provides the "organizing theological centre" of the entire message of the Old Testament as well as the construct that provides the "essential coherence between the Old Testament and the New."[129]

"… so that they might be with him" (Mark 3:13-19)

The notion of relationship stems from the very nature of God and is deeply rooted in all of God's dealings with his creation as seen in the biblical covenants. As a covenant mediator, Jesus himself establishes relationship with his followers. The importance of the fact that Jesus called his first disciples before launching his public ministry was already emphasized earlier in this chapter. The words of the Great Commission were preceded by the selection of a few, whom Jesus would later commission to continue his own ministry. Mark 3:13-19 recounts the moment of appointing the specific group of the Twelve whom he named apostles. Moreover, Mark 3:14 articulates a critical element of Jesus' mission strategy. It delineates the specific twofold reason for selecting his apostles: "so that they might be with him" (Gr. ἵνα ὦσιν μετ᾽ αὐτοῦ) and so that Jesus might also send them out on a mission.[130] While the second part is almost to be expected in

[128] Niehaus, *Biblical Theology, Vol. 1*, 2. In fact, the biblical narratives reveal *no other way* of God establishing a relationship with humanity than through covenants, which is why the subject is of crucial importance as foundation for human relationships and disciple-making.

[129] Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2007) 29, 31.

[130] William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 133.

light of the task at hand, the first is the one that can be easily overlooked or taken for granted. Mark is the only one of the gospel writers who has insightfully included this important detail.[131] The order in which Mark articulates this twofold purpose of Jesus must not be a coincidence. Being with Jesus comes first and provides for the disciples the context for doing anything with him and for him. Out of this ongoing relationship stems the ability, the preparation, the authorization, and the commission itself. Being with Jesus seems to be another way of referring to disciples following him. In its most basic meaning, being with Jesus was a way for the disciples to get to spend time with their Lord and to have the opportunity to learn from him in the most natural context of daily human relationships. In its disciple-making efforts, the early church followed in the steps of Jesus. Coleman's remark on this is noteworthy:

> This relationship provided the environment for their training. The apostolic church did not erect colleges or theological seminaries, or even set up educational seminars. They had instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith and life, but not in formal classes or institutional programs. To mold the life of their members, they simply got learners and teachers together in natural settings, where they lived and worked every day.[132]

It is in the context of such association that a discipler can exercise "the impact of one life on another – the character, skill, and perspective of one godly person influencing another willing person."[133] This was, writes Coleman, "the essence of his [Jesus'] training program."[134] One can

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[131] The parallel passages in the Synoptics are in Matthew 10:1-4 and Luke 6:12-16, 9:1 but both of them focus on Jesus giving authority to the disciples and sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform miraculous healings and exorcisms. The Gospel of John does not include any such parallel passage, except the calling of some of the individual disciples (e.g., John 1:35-51).

[132] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 62.

[133] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 270.

[134] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 33. In his classic work, Coleman outlines the principle of association that would be observed in the ministry of Jesus, namely the fact that Jesus made it a priority to spend time with his disciples and how this kind of relationship provided the context for his whole training with them for their mission ahead. Coleman's book will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

hardly imagine that such kind of training would have been effective only in the context of synagogue visits or would produce any significant result only in church services today.[135]

One of the staggering facts about Jesus' earthly journey is his incarnation (John 1:14) as an expression of God's perfect will to effectuate the salvation of fallen humanity. Physical presence among people and with his disciples must have been the key to Jesus fulfilling God's eternal redemptive purposes. Created in God's image, people are social beings, naturally endowed with both the ability and the need to relate to other living creatures and other humans in particular.[136] Jim Putman sees life change being a rarity among Christians today as a result of the lack of a relational context for learning. For this reason, Putman emphasizes relationships as needed for real teaching and real learning. Discipleship "requires conversation, modeling, encouragement, debriefing, and practice, all of which need to happen in the context of relationship. Without relationship between believers, there is no model to follow, no authenticity, no accountability, no application, and no support for the journey."[137]

The apostles' presence with Jesus is so intertwined in the gospel accounts that one rarely reads about Jesus being alone. They were in an ongoing relationship with their Lord. One of the subsequent New Testament accounts in Acts 4:1-22 tells of the misfortunes of two of the early apostles, Peter and John, when the religious authorities arrested them for proclaiming the gospel. They were astonished by the contrast between the boldness of the apostles and their outlook of uneducated and common men. But their identity became apparent on the basis of the authorities' recognition "*that they had been with Jesus*" (Acts 4:13). Whatever signs the religious authorities

[135] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010), 23.

[136] Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church? – Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville, TN, B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 146, 37. According to Rainer and Rainer's research, one of the greatest needs of young adults is "building relationships and connecting with one another. This could be said is true of all human beings.

[137] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 22-23.

were able to discern about Peter and John being with Jesus, the time spent in relationship with him has produced palpable results in the lives of his followers, in their words, and in their actions: literally, "the print of His character was upon them."[138] Todd Wilson summarizes this well: "Relationships are the incubator for discipleship and the transformation that accompanies it."[139] It is worth noting that relationship between God and his people and relationship between Christ-followers are at the heart of a number of the New Testament metaphors for the church.[140]

The way Jesus trained his disciples not only worked for him but provides the model for disciple-making today. Putman and Harrington put it succinctly: "Discipleship is the emphasis. Relationships are the method… His primary method was life-on-life."[141] Jesus modeled discipleship and disciple-making for his apostles as they spent time with him. Nothing less than "being with" in this kind of relationship will be needed for the training of disciples and disciple-makers and following up with them today. However, the work of disciple-making needs to start with the training of leaders!

Sheep With Shepherds

The Bible uses a popular farm imagery of a shepherd and sheep as a metaphor for the relationship of the people of God with their God as well as for the relationship between the

[138] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 117.

[139] Todd Wilson, *More: Find Your Personal Calling and Live Life to the Fullest Measure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 124.

[140] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 211-212. Coleman provides a number of examples: family (Galatians 3:26; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:10-18), bride of Christ (Mark 2:18-20; John 3:29; Romans 7:1-4; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelations 19:7), temple (2 Corinthians 5:1; 1 Peter 2:4-8), priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:4-9), flock (Luke 12:32; John 10:1-16; John 10:27-28; Acts 20:28, 29; 1 Peter 5:2-4), body (Ephesians 4:4-13; Romans 12:1-31), the vineyard of God (John 15:5).

[141] Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 33.

people of God and their leaders.[142] People need someone not only to show them the way, but to walk the way with them, a shepherd-like figure to point them to the grand vision of God and to empower them to pursue it.

Leaders play the crucial role of shaping a vision for discipleship and establishing in the church a disciple-making model that multiplies disciples. Shepherds go after the sheep. Sheep follow their shepherds. A lot hangs on the understanding of and faithfulness of church leaders to the Great Commission and the vision they instill in the Christ-followers under their care. No one understood this and demonstrated it in a better way than Jesus, the Good Shepherd himself.[143] As already discussed earlier, in his own life, before making any significant ministry effort, Jesus selected his first disciples with the clear goal of bringing them alongside him and teaching them to continue his mission by training others.

Matthew 4:18-22

Matthew 4:18-22 and its Synoptic parallels[144] are key texts to understanding Jesus' strategy to win the world. William Lane rightly underlines the vividness and urgency of Jesus' words, which makes them truly memorable.[145] They offer great insight into the nature of Jesus' invitation to prospective disciples and the rationale behind his exclusive bid on leaders as the key

[142] E.g., In the New Testament: Matthew 18:12-14; John 10:1-18. It is also a prominent imagery in the Old Testament: Psalm 78:52; Psalm 100:3; Jeremiah 50:6; and the infamous Ezekiel 34 in which Ezekiel receives a prophecy of judgment from God against the leaders of Israel.

[143] John 10:1-18, esp. 11-18.

[144] These parallel passages, followed later by the calling of the apostle Matthew in Matthew 9:9-13 become like paradigm text for someone being called by Jesus to follow him. Mark's account recorded in Mark 1:16-20 is nearly identical in length and wording. Luke's account in Luke 5:1-11 is significantly longer and includes Jesus getting into Peter's boat and teaching the people from there, a preliminary exchange between Jesus and Peter about casting the nets for fish, Peter's recognition of Jesus and of his own sinfulness, the miraculous catch of fish, which are then followed by Jesus' explicit call to follow him and their response of leaving everything and following him.

[145] William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 67.

players in his strategy. The twofold plot recounts the calling of two pairs of brothers and their immediate command-fulfillment response of leaving everything and following Jesus.[146] Matthew has not recorded any verbal response on the part of these four initial disciples. But Jesus' words to Simon Peter and his brother Andrew stand out as the only words in the incident.[147]

The summons of Jesus includes three elements. First, in a prophet-like manner,[148] Jesus calls the disciples to follow him. "Come after me" (Gr. Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου) is not an invitation to join him only for the rest of the day as earlier Jesus had invited them at John's baptism (John 1:39). It is a call to get on a journey following him.[149] In fact, Jesus' approach to them and his wording suggest "not even an invitation, but rather a demand."[150] From the beginning, the disciples' role is determined as well as their position. Jesus is to lead, they are to follow. He is in front of them, they are behind him.[151]

Second, in Matthew's wording, Jesus says that he will make them (Gr. καὶ ποιήσω ὑμᾶς) into something. Mark's wording includes "I will make you *to become*…" (Gr. γενέσθαι) which seems to catch well the idea of the process and transformation through which Jesus will take them. On this journey, they will absorb everything that Jesus will teach them and he will instill in

[146] A command-fulfillment formula is a literary device frequently used in both the Old and the New Testament. It includes a command, which is followed by, often in identical wording, a fulfillment of the command. One such brilliant example is in 1 Kings 17:1-7 where the prophet Elijah's prediction of drought and the Lord's command to him are followed by their fulfillment in a beautiful chiastic structure. An excellent gospel example is the healing of a paralyzed man in Luke 5:17-26, where he is commanded to rise, take up his mat, and go home, which is exactly fulfilled.

[147] Jesus' call to Peter and Andrew is not explicitly reiterated in the calling of James and John.

[148] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 147. France observes that, the call of Jesus is more typical of a prophet than of a rabbi as seen in parallel accounts of a prophetic call to a follower in the Old Testament. Cf. Elijah's call of Elisha in 1 Kings 19:19-21.

[149] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 147. R.T. France reminds of the practice in Jesus' day for those who wanted to follow a rabbi to usually take the initiative themselves and literally to walk behind their teacher.

[150] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 147.

[151] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 28.

them his character, his priorities, and the values of the kingdom of God. His expectation is for them to obey him and to be loyal to him[152] and, in the process of being with him, they will undergo an inner transformation of their allegiance, beliefs, attitudes, and actions, so that they can become, to use the apostle Paul's words, "conformed to the image of his Son [Jesus]" (Romans 8:29).[153]

Third, Jesus tells them that he will make them "fishers of men" (Gr. ἁλιεῖς ἀνθρώπων). Here lies the purpose of Jesus' effort in calling and transforming the disciples. He enlists them not only as his life or travel companions but as his partners in ministry and he will instill in them the commitment to his mission. Just as Putman and Harrington affirm, "a disciple of Jesus is saved for a purpose."[154] In Luke's wording in Luke 5:10, "from now on" (Gr. ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν) marks a definite "break with the past" and a new beginning for the disciples in terms of their allegiance, commitment and main occupation.[155] Jesus' language and use of a fishing metaphor is not accidental. The fishers of *fish* will become fishers of *men*. For one thing, the wordplay naturally flows from the disciples' previous occupation.[156] But with its Old Testament background in mind[157] and "God's eschatological sending of Jesus," his call of disciples

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[152] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 43. Coleman describes this process as the principle of consecration.

[153] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 30.

[154] Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 49.

[155] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 235.

[156] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 147.

[157] David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, *"Luke"* in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 292. A few Old Testament passages provide background for the use of a fishing and fishers metaphor. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Jeremiah, vol. 8* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 169. Jeremiah 16:16 speaks of God sending fishers and hunters in judgment over the people of Judah. Jeffrey Niehaus, *Amos, The Minor Prophets, An Exegetic & Expository Commentary, vol. 1*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 1992), 393. Amos 4:2 speaks of people being taken away with fishing hooks in captivity as a

underlines the urgency of the "eschatological task of gathering men in view of the forthcoming judgment of God."[158] The fishers, in Luke's wording, "will be catching men" (Gr. ἀνθρώπους ἔσῃ ζωγρῶν),[159] which emphasizes their active and progressive role in the task at hand.[160]

Jesus exemplified *par excellence* the principle of selection.[161] He was not planning to conduct his ministry alone. In his incarnation and the limitations of his human existence, Jesus could only be with and invest his time in a given number of people. He knew well that "unless spiritual leaders could be raised up who could multiply his ministry – redeemed men and women with the heart of Christ – there was no way the waiting harvest could be gathered."[162]

Jesus' example lays out the foundation for the ministry of disciple-making with regards to its human resource and a vision into the future. It is as relevant today as it was in his own time and in the era of the early church. Pastors and church leaders hold the key position on which hangs the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Chan underlines the crucial role of the leader by writing that "the key to a discplemaking church is the disciplemaking pastor. He champions it.

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result of God's judgment on Israel. F.F. Bruce, *Habakkuk, The Minor Prophets, An Exegetic & Expository Commentary, vol. 2*, ed. Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House Books, 1993), 854. In Habakkuk 1:14-17, the Chaldeans are committing violence against the nations around them and their actions are described in terms of catching and dragging people out with a hook, net, and dragnet. So Habakkuk naturally complains to God and asks how long God will allow this to continue. The fishing imagery is overall used in rather negative sense and refers to circumstances of judgment. Jesus' intention to make the disciples fishers of men should be probably understood not so much as a direct reference to the negative Old Testament imagery but rather as conveying the more broad idea of the disciples exercising the function of attracting and recruiting people for God's kingdom just like a fisher would attract and catch fish.

[158] William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 67-68.

[159] The meaning of ζωγρέω is to "capture alive" and it is rarely used in the New Testament (only here in Luke 5:10 and in 2 Timothy 2:26 where it refers to people who are "captured" by the devil to do his will). BDAG, 429-430.

[160] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 648-649. ἔσῃ ζωγρῶν has a future progressive aspect which is a rare grammatical category in the New Testament.

[161] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21-42. Coleman skillfully explores and describes Jesus' strategic choice in ministry of selecting disciples who will be able to lead the multitudes.

[162] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 57-58.

He is passionate about it. He models it."[163] This is the concept behind this thesis-project as well, namely, in an established Christian culture, in which churches are not obedient to the Great Commission, to reach out to indigenous pastors and church leaders and train them to begin initiating disciple-making efforts in their faith communities.

The old adage that there is no success without a successor rings true.[164] Church leaders have to be trained to take the lead and engage the people God has entrusted to their care in the process of training disciples who in turn become disciplers. This kind of multiplication is the only way to assure that there is "an ever-expanding ministry to the world."[165]

Disciple-making is what has the potential of producing leaders and laborers for the harvest. Jim Putman shares his deep conviction that such leaders are already in the local church. Putman makes a critical point that God has already placed such leaders "*within* every church because He cares for the people the church needs to reach."[166] Could it be that church leadership is often oblivious to this fact or that it deliberately ignores it? Putman could not have stated the case better than this: "These leaders often sit in the pews, waiting to be developed, to be released into ministry, but often they never are. Our churches are filled with diamonds in the rough, and when pastors and church leaders begin to take seriously our mandate to disciple our people, these leaders will emerge."[167] The role of the church and its leadership as well as of the missionary then is to fulfill the New Testament call of the apostle Paul to equip the saints to do the work

[163] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 57.

[164] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 53.

[165] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 129.

[166] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 18-19.

[167] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 18-19.

through which "the entire universe recognizes the reality and wisdom of God."[168] The selection and training of a few leaders creates the platform for a process to be replicated, and through reproduction, to reach out to the local and the wider community with the gospel, which is the subject of the last section of this chapter.

Winning By Multiplication

In John 15:1-17, as part of Jesus' so called Farewell Discourse, the gospel writer reports some of the most memorable words of Jesus, which he spoke to his select group of disciples shortly before his arrest and his death on the cross. The metaphor reveals Jesus as the true vine (Gr. ἡ ἄμπελος ἡ ἀληθινή) and his disciples as the vine branches (Gr. τὰ κλήματα) (15:1, 5). Jesus is the new Israel and his disciples are participants in him.[169] His pronouncement of "I am" (Gr. Ἐγώ εἰμι) about himself as the true vine provides the foundation for the rest of the imagery (15:1-5). However, the thrust of his words is clearly directed towards the position of the disciples in relation to him and his expectation of them. First, Jesus emphasizes to the disciples their vital need to abide in him. Being attached to Jesus and inseparable from him is the only viable way for them to ensure that their earthly lives would have any eternal relevance (John 15:4). In this regard, the frequency of the language of "abiding" is remarkable and dominates the text.[170]

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[168] Mike Barnett, *The Missing Key to the Future of Evangelical Mission* in David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, ed. *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues In The Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 229-230.

[169] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 502-503. The background for this imagery could be traced to different Old Testament sources like the infamous Isaiah 5 passage about the vineyard as a picture of God's people Israel. Here however, Jesus' own claim is that "I am" (Gr. Ἐγώ εἰμι) the vine points to Jesus himself as the new Israel.

[170] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 998. Keener observes that the Greek term μένω and its cognates are "dominating the theology just as the vine and fruit dominate the image." The reader of John 15:1-17 simply cannot miss Jesus' emphasis on the multiple references to abiding. The idea is explicitly articulated by the verb "abide / remain" 11 times – v. 4 (x3), v. 5 (x1), v. 6 (x1), v. 7 (x2), v. 9 (x1), v. 10 (x2), and v. 16 (x1).

Second, this interconnectedness with Jesus is not for its own sake but it has tangible ramifications – just as the branches of a vine, the disciples have to produce fruit. The theme of "bearing fruit" is interwoven in the whole passage. Just like with the language of "abiding," this part of the discourse is saturated by "bearing fruit" terminology.[171] It is significant that Jesus makes *abiding* and *bearing fruit* intrinsically interconnected. *Abiding* naturally leads to *fruit bearing* and *fruit bearing* (or lack of it) is a display and proof of *abiding* (or lack of it) (15:5). Bearing fruit is the rationale behind abiding and no presence of fruit basically makes abiding meaningless (15:2).

Jesus insists that the disciples produce not only some fruit but that they would be abundantly productive and bear "more fruit" (Gr. καρπὸν πλείονα) and "much fruit" (Gr. καρπὸν πολύν) (15:2, 5, 8). What is more, in his words, fruitfulness is a way of glorifying God and it is also to be considered as the distinguishing proof of discipleship! (15:8). In the more immediate context, the fruit Jesus is referring to is keeping his commandments and loving one another as he himself has loved them (15:10, 12). In John's use, it "suggests moral fruit."[172] Yet, Jesus' words also establish a principle that will encompass the life, ministry, and witness of the disciples. Coleman writes: "No wonder Jesus so indelibly impressed on his disciples the necessity and inevitability of life reproducing its kind."[173]

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[171] A quick textual analysis of John 15:1-17 shows the following: the wording for "bear fruit" or "bear much/more fruit" is used 7 times: v. 2 (x3), v. 4 (x1), v. 5 (x1), v. 8 (x1), and v. 16 (x1).

[172] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 997.

[173] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 92. Coleman dedicates a whole chapter to a discussion on the *Principle of Reproduction* as one of the main principles, which shaped Jesus' earthly ministry and his disciple-making efforts.

The disciples of Jesus then and now are not to retreat into life within their own community. Instead, they are summoned to engage in Jesus' mission and proclaim the gospel.[174] In Jesus' own words, the very reason for choosing and appointing his disciples is that they should "go and bear fruit" and that their "fruit should abide" (15:16). Coleman could not have summarized the issue better: "A barren Christian is a contradiction. A tree is known by its fruit."[175] Later, in his High Priestly Prayer, recorded in the Gospel of John 17:1-26, Jesus demonstrates the same concern for fruit bearing and reproduction of his ministry and the continuation of his mission.[176] He prays for himself, for his immediate disciples, and devotes the last part of his longest recorded prayer to the later generation of believers, which includes Christ-followers today. Jesus anticipates the expansion of his mission through the ministry of his followers. His prayer "reflects Jesus' vision of spiritual multiplication and reproduction."[177]

The same principle guides the apostle Paul and shapes his ministry in the early days of the Church. His well-known instruction to his friend and co-worker Timothy encapsulates the same vision for a mission to the world that is perpetuated through the process of multiplication in disciple-making: "and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). Beougher notes that there are four generations in Paul's vision included in the process of disciple-making: Paul, Timothy, faithful men, and those whom they would disciple in turn, and consequently he concludes that "the strategy of multiplication is the best way to reach the world for Christ."[178]

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[174] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 280.

[175] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 92.

[176] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 248.

[177] Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters*, 248.

[178] Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 328-330.

The Church and Addition Vis-à-vis Jesus and Multiplication[179]

The Gypsy church (and the global Church) is widely stuck with addition. Its preoccupation with efficiency and productivity – measurable results, numbers, "increasing attendance, events, programs, buildings," creates a distraction and prevents it from discipling.[180] Ignoring Jesus' example while hoping to achieve Jesus' results is unrealistic. Jesus assured his followers that they would be doing greater works than he did[181] and Coleman rightly suspects that Jesus' charge and his promise "would seem to relate to the multiplication of disciples according to the Great Commission mandate."[182] This kind of multiplication, evident in the work of the apostles, is what the author of Acts will also aptly depict in his treatment of the early history of the Church.

Jesus focused his own ministry efforts on a selected group of people, even though from a human point of view this was not a very successful enterprise, considering the very limited number of people Jesus trained for an extended period of time.[183] Jesus knew that addition would not accomplish his long-term vision for winning the world, but multiplication would. In the words of Coleman, "here is the genius of His plan to win "all nations," raising up a people in His

[179] "Multiplication" could be a misleading term and may communicate an idea that is too technical and mechanistic. Unfortunately, this is exactly how it has been taken in some Christian circles and ministries. "Reproduction" is a better term because it implies a more personal relationship and connection between a discipler and disciple. The two terms can be seen as a sequence – reproduction being the initial stage of replicating Jesus' disciple-making model and multiplication being the larger scale ministry that stems from reproduction. Or they can be understood simply as synonyms and as interchangeable. "Multiplication" seems to be the more contemporary and up-to-date term and this is why For the purposes of our present discussion, we will use the two terms interchangeably.

[180] Ajith Fernando, *Discipling in a Multicultural World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 42-43.

[181] John 14:22

[182] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 85.

[183] At first glance, Jesus' ministry was far from being successful. He only trained a very limited number of disciples who, facing the first major threat for their own lives at the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus, denied even knowing him (like Peter) and scattered as if they had never been trained by the Messiah, whom they earlier recognized as the Son of the living God (Matthew 16).

likeness. For disciples of Christ grow in His character, and by the same virtue, they develop in His life-style and ministry to the world."[184] Jesus intentionally devised a strategy with the end goal in mind and he concentrated his efforts on developing an "ever-enlarging labor force, and in time, through multiplication, workers will bring the Good News to the ends of the earth."[185] The genius of Jesus' plan was as relevant to his own ministry endeavor as it is to the church and its ministry today because, as Stetzer puts it, "the Kingdom is best advanced through multiplication and not just addition."[186]

The Church and Disciple-Making That Multiplies

The reality of hell and God's impending judgment over sin continues to be the world's worst news. Yet, "the only entity that God has placed in the world to address this subject for the sake of the world is the church… and only the church is entrusted with the apostolic role of gospel proclamation whereby people are brought to the foot of the cross."[187]

The Church has not always been faithful to its calling.[188] Yet, it is the Church, which is burdened with the task of reproducing. Coleman boldly affirms that "any activity not in step with His [God's] design for human destiny is an exercise in futility. The sooner we realize this and

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[184] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 53.

[185] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 53.

[186] Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting A Church That's Biblically Sound And Reaching People In Culture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 316.

[187] Christopher R. Little, In Response To: "The Future of Evangelicals in Mission" in David Hesselgrave and Ed Stetzer, eds. *Missionshift:Global Mission Issues In The Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 217. Christopher R. Little makes the point that all the secular agencies in the world can address certain problems of human existence but only the church is in the position to address humanity's most basic and most pressing spiritual need.

[188] This weakness has given birth to para-church ministries, which to a degree fill in the gap where the Church is insufficient in its presence and mission efforts.

align our way with His, the sooner we will be relevant to eternity."[189] Disciple-making is at the heart of what the church is to do "because only mature disciples reproduce and create movements that can be sustained for world evangelization."[190]

Each ministry of the church has to be a stepping-stone and a channel designed for multiplication, which is a matter of obedience to the Lord and to his own example. Pursuing multiplication is, according to Chan, a form of "evidence of following Jesus" and it is the inevitable result of following him because he empowers us to do so. Chan affirms succinctly the case by saying that "a transformed life multiplies itself and this multiplication is the evidence of transformation."[191] For the church then, shaping its overall ministry and disciple-making in particular is not an option but an imperative in the pursuit of training disciples to replicate the process and, in turn, to start investing in the lives of others. Chan warns, that "it is unwise to *keep on* imparting to those who *will not* pass it on to others!" In fact, Chan goes as far as saying, that "non-multiplication is non-discipleship!"[192]

The world's population has already passed the 8th billion mark and the multitudes of lost people can be effectively reached. However, before much can be done, "the laboring force in the harvest must be multiplied" and every disciple of Christ plays a crucial role in this "ever-expanding working force."[193]

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[189] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 31.

[190] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1990), 55.

[191] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 46.

[192] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 39.

[193] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 46.

The book of Acts, certainly not by accident, frequently alludes to the numerical expansion observable in the early church. The reader is to become well aware that "the apostolic witness has measurable results"[194] and so the author is stressing the remarkable early development of the church and its numeric increase. The initial addition has turned into "evangelistic multiplication" as the first Christ-followers "reproduced their lifestyle in the lives of those about them."[195] Will the Gypsy church of the 21st century follow this example?

A Final Word

The Church today lives in the continuation of the Book of Acts until the return of Christ. Jesus' call is to "live with the harvest in view."[196] Through the successes and failures in ministry, "the ultimate triumph of evangelism is never in doubt"[197] and despite the struggles of these present times, "his church is triumphant."[198] Multiplication in disciple-making is the only viable way to see the Great Commission fulfilled. Mere addition will never achieve that.

With eyes never failing to contemplate the Throne of God in heaven, today's church can and should look up and look forward to the fulfillment of the fascinating vision of the great multitude gathered in God's presence and celebrating his majesty.[199] With this vision of God's eternal kingdom in mind, the church has to look outward and never lose sight of the "aimless multitudes [which] drift ever nearer to destruction, without a song to sing or a cause to

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[194] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 27.

[195] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 27-30.

[196] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 63.

[197] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 45.

[198] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 122.

[199] Revelation 7:9.

espouse."[200] But in the obedience of the church to multiply and reach the world with the gospel, the cause of Christ will prevail and "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11)

[200] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 31.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The field of disciple-making is by no means new to the ministry of the global Church. Since the time of Jesus and of the early church, communities of Christ-followers have not only survived but have also thrived and perpetuated the work of Christ by consciously or unconsciously doing the work of evangelism and disciple-making. Edmund Chan's brief affirmation in this regard sums up wonderfully the power of making disciples as it relates to the ministry of the church and its health: "A disciplemaking Church is indeed investing in eternity. It is built to last!"[1]

Mobilizing indigenous minority church leaders in Bulgaria for initiating intentional disciple-making efforts in their local faith communities, which is the focus of this thesis-project, requires a review of some of the literature on disciple-making. More specific areas of exploration pertinent to this project include the calling of the local church vis-à-vis the Great Commission, the inspiration and precedent behind Jesus' commission to make disciples of all nations, the critical role of church leadership in instilling a vision for disciple-making and leading the way in demonstrating it, and last but not least, the intentional character of disciple-making, without which little could be accomplished.

In light of these areas of special interest, this chapter provides a review of literature focused on major works of four authorities and passionate practitioners in the field of disciple-making today, which inform this thesis and have helped shape the foundation and rationale for the accomplishment of this project. The four authors and their works are as follows: Robert E.

[1] Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 87.

Coleman and his masterpiece on evangelism and disciple-making, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*[2] and another one of his works, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*[3], Edmund Chan and his work, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry*,[4] Bill Hull and his book *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith*,[5] and finally Jim Putman's *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*.[6]

Disciple-Making From The Source

For over sixty years, Robert E. Coleman has been a signature name for disciple-making worldwide. His teachings and published work have inspired generations of disciple-makers, pastors, church leaders and church members. His writings have helped shape discipleship and disciple-making the way it is being understood today. Coleman recognizes that until the middle of the twentieth century, besides the work of A.B. Bruce[7] and a few others, there had been little published on Jesus' evangelistic approach, which shaped and was at the center of his earthly life

[2] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2006).

[3] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle: Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992).

[4] Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013).

[5] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1990).

[6] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010).

[7] Alexander B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: Timeless Principles for Leadership Development* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1988).

and ministry. He admits, that "the subject of Jesus' basic strategy has rarely been given the attention it deserves."[8]

Coleman's work has many distinctive aspects among which are his clarity of thought and expression, his deep conviction about God's calling to the church to fulfill the Great Commission, and his practical applications. But all of these aspects gain their significance from the fact that Coleman is deeply rooted in the biblical text. In *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, already in the middle of the last century, he makes a much needed return to an exploration of the gospel accounts in search for the patterns of life and ministry that defined Jesus' own approach to the evangelistic mission at hand and to disciple-making in particular. Coleman's starting point are the gospel texts as "the only eyewitness accounts that we have of the Master at work" and he rightly considers them as the "best, and only inerrant, Textbook on Evangelism" that helps the church to discern the plan of Jesus.[9]

At first glance, this may seem like stating the obvious but Coleman's approach to ministry rooted in Scripture is critical. The global and local church today has demonstrated its propensity to get distracted and to easily lose sight of Scripture as the foundation for contemporary ministry. On the one hand, modern technology, business models for success, or even church ministry itself, while being helpful sources of information and experience, often become an obsession for the local church at the expense of the example of the Bible. On the other hand, Jesus' plan is in fact so interwoven into the natural flow of daily life and his approach seems so different from "that of the modern church that its implications are nothing

[8] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 14-15.

[9] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 15-16.

less than revolutionary."[10] A clear commitment to Scripture is absolutely indispensible in order to cast a vision for disciple-making especially in churches like the ones in the Gypsy community in Bulgaria where such a vision is lacking. And such loyalty to the example of Jesus can inform and transform any disciple-making efforts of the church.

Coleman has become well known for the principles he has observed and outlined from the lifestyle and ministry of Jesus. He himself points out to the importance of distinguishing between methods and principles. Methods change and evolve while principles are rather universal and applicable across time and space.[11] This is in fact one of the greatest merits in Coleman's writings. He offers to the Christian world his biblical observations, crystallized into principles that have been, are, and will be relevant to the ministry of the church and to disciple-making in particular as long as the church exists in anticipation of Christ's Second Coming. This speaks directly to the contemporary church across the globe and its inordinate commitment to methods, which often produce temporary results and often become useless after a period of application. This is why Coleman insists on focusing and grasping the essence of Jesus' guiding "principles which determined his methods."[12] In his book, Coleman outlines eight principles to which, in his teachings, he adds a ninth principle – the Principle of Impartation.[13] The study and application of these principles are critical if any local church truly aims at reaching their community with the gospel, fulfilling the Great Commission, and being active agents in the expansion of God's kingdom rule.

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[10] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 18.

[11] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 332.

[12] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 14.

[13] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 333. Beougher provides a helpful summary of each principle. For the full scope of each principle, the reader will also benefit tremendously from reading Coleman's whole book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.

The *Principle of Incarnation* reveals Jesus' coming to earth in human flesh as an example of servanthood for his disciples to follow. It also underscores the importance of physical presence in ministry. The *Principle of Selection* stems from the fact that Jesus literally began his public ministry by choosing a small group of followers whom he appointed as his apostles because "he needed people who could lead the multitudes."[14] This points to the crucial role of choosing a few and focusing on training them without, of course, ignoring the larger group and the multitudes. *The Principle of Association* describes Jesus' calling of his disciples to be with him and his determination to spend most of his time with them in order to give them the opportunity to learn from him in the most natural context of daily human relationships. Coleman observes: "Amazing as it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men his way was to draw them close to himself. He was his own school and curriculum."[15] The *Principle of Consecration* illustrates Jesus' expectation from his disciples to be obedient and loyal to him (John 14:15) just like Jesus himself was obedient in everything to the Father (John 14:10, 31). As he was preparing leaders for his kingdom rule, he required "absolute obedience to the Master's will, even as it meant complete abandonment of their own."[16] The *Principle of Impartation* underlines the absolute need for the indwelling and empowerment of the Holy Spirit if the ministry work of Jesus' disciples would be expected to have any significance and to achieve anything at all. Coleman summarizes it this way: "We must have his life in us by the Spirit if we are to do his work and practice his teaching. Any evangelistic work without this is as lifeless as it is meaningless."[17] The *Principle of Demonstration* encapsulates such a basic, yet profound truth

[14] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 28.

[15] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 33.

[16] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 50.

[17] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 60.

about the teaching-learning process both in life in general and in Christian disciple-making: showing and demonstrating must precede explaining. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples and allowed them to be witnesses of his life and ministry. Evangelism and disciple-making were enacted in front of the disciples' eyes and were simply rooted in the experiences and circumstances of daily life. Jesus' "training classes were never dismissed" and everything Jesus was saying or doing was "a personal lesson in reality" so the disciples were "learning practically every moment of their waking day."[18] The *Principle of Delegation* naturally follows. Jesus knew that modeling his life and ministry for the disciples would achieve nothing unless he involved them in his mission and allowed them to put into practice everything they were learning from him daily.[19] The *Principle of Supervision* expresses Jesus' work of following up on the accomplishment of the ministry tasks he entrusted to his disciples. This kind of follow-up allowed Jesus to direct and extend further his teaching to the disciples, to correct them, and to encourage them. Such follow-up is a major necessity in the training of Gypsy church leaders in Bulgaria to initiate disciple-making efforts in their local churches as it proves interest in their own development and ministry enterprises beyond the limits of formal training. Demonstration, delegation and supervision of the disciples were part of a plan that was "calculated to bring out the best that was in them."[20] Finally, the *Principle of Reproduction* captures a key understanding and practice of Jesus about the ultimate goal and fulfillment of the Great Commission: ministry efforts must be expanded not by addition but by reproduction, which is the only viable way to reach the world with the gospel. The effectiveness of any evangelistic and disciple-making effort

[18] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 68.

[19] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 72.

[20] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 86.

could only be evaluated by whether or not it is perpetuated and extended to the next generation of disciples of Jesus.[21]

The outlined principles from the life and ministry of Jesus paint a peculiar picture of the nature of disciple-making, to which Coleman devotes a whole book – *The Great Commission Lifestyle*.[22] Again, he aptly explores the gospel narratives and observes that disciple-making in its essence is a *lifestyle*. This is a key understanding for the local church today, if it truly intends to be obedient to the Great Commission and to conduct a ministry that conforms to the pattern if its Lord and Head (Ephesians 5:23)! Jesus did not look for events and circumstances to create a special ministry context in order to conduct his ministry and to train his disciples. He did not make his disciple-making efforts by setting up programs, seminars or conferences.[23] Instead, Coleman emphasizes how Jesus' incarnate life and ministry were so intertwined, that "his life was the object lesson of His doctrine."[24] It is in fact intriguing, that a lot of his ministry and meetings with people Jesus conducted around the table in private homes and this natural context was a platform for him to both reach out to the lost and to train his selected disciples.[25] In addition, Coleman pinpoints another critical aspect that the contemporary church needs to heed. He underlines the fact that "making disciples is not a special calling or a gift of the Spirit" but a reflection of Jesus' way of life among people which he expects the church to follow.[26] Such understanding of the nature of disciple-making both liberates and challenges the local church.

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[21] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 95.

[22] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle: Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992).

[23] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 64.

[24] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 60.

[25] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 61.

[26] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 65.

First, it liberates it because it takes the practicing of ministry and disciple-making from under the sole control of a selected group of leaders to involve the local congregation. Second, it challenges it because it calls for a higher commitment of both leadership and congregation to the calling of the Great Commission and to practical ways of accomplishing it. In both these ways, this understanding is very significant to local Gypsy churches in Bulgaria and their ministry.

The weakness of the church vis-à-vis the Great Commission may have a number of causes. However, two of them seem to be easily identifiable. One, the loss of vision for the calling of Jesus to make disciples. Two, as noted above, the tendency of the local church to adopt models and strategies that are not in line with the blueprint of Jesus described in the gospels and demonstrated also in the ministry of the early church portrayed in the book of Acts. With the risk of overgeneralizing, it could be said that many local churches are focused on the multitudes and pursue expansion by numbers of converts, instead of selecting and training disciples.[27] The church tends to reduce its ministry to a series of worship services instead of developing an ever-expanding relational network to allow church members to be trained in real-life discipleship. In the pursuit of momentary success and increase of numbers, the church lowers the expectations for people to conform to the life and character of Jesus instead of making more and more explicit the biblical call to spiritual growth and Christ-likeness. The church largely conducts its ministry efforts following its own models instead of relying on the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.[28] It has also subverted the biblical approach to teaching and learning by reducing disciple-making to a program or a seminar instead of demonstrating real-life discipleship,

[27] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 29-30.

[28] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 338. Beougher quotes an interesting statement from A.W. Tozer saying that "If the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from the church today, 95 percent of what we do would go on and no one would know the difference." He acknowledges that Tozer may be overstating the case but Tozer's point cannot and should not be overlooked.

involving Christ-followers in practical ministry, and overseeing them in the process. Finally, the church is spinning its wheels by running countless initiatives that only contribute to addition, not multiplication.

In light of all this, Coleman remains a powerful voice to be heeded as he calls for a radical return of the church to its biblical calling to make disciples following in the steps of the Master with full commitment and determination. The church is known for talking but not acting upon it. But Coleman's own determination is compelling: "Indeed, if we believe that Jesus is Lord, and that He died to bring redemption to all people, then we cannot sit by idly while multitudes perish."[29] The church cannot afford lingering in aimlessness and indecision and Coleman stresses the urgency of the situation. The church is involved in real warfare and the stakes involve issues of life and death, so "every day that we are indifferent to our responsibilities is a day lost to the cause of Christ."[30] Reaching out to the world with the Good News can only be possible if the church commits to fulfill the Great Commission. This is "the heartbeat of all that we are called to be and do. It is the commission of the church which gives meaning to all else that is undertaken in the name of Christ."[31] In this regard, nothing less than the mobilization of pastors, church leaders and whoever else is ready to follow the example of the Master, will suffice to fulfill the Great Commission in anticipation of Christ's return. Coleman's approach to the challenge of disciple-making is straightforward and, in his understanding, if the church has no one to make disciples, it should still start somewhere with a few and anticipate growth. Coleman's work is significant in its own right but it has also ignited a

[29] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 40.

[30] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 50-51.

[31] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 79.

spark and became foundational for a newer generation of thinkers and practitioners of disciple-making.

On A Pursuit Of Intentional Multiplication

Edmund Chan with his book *A Certain Kind* brings to the table his pastoral passion and experience of leadership of what could now serve as a model of a church that his ministry has helped build around and fuel by disciple-making.[32] It would not be an overstatement that most of the literature on discipleship and disciple-making is published in English and originates primarily from the United States. Things be as they may, the global church seems to be widely unrepresented in the disciple-making discussion. With this in mind, voices like Edmund Chan's are even more important as they contribute to a contemporary understanding of the matter by reflecting knowledge, interpretation, culture, and experience from other parts of the world.

Chan draws from Coleman's foundational writings on disciple-making. At the same time, his way of writing is also a reflection of his own convictions, aspirations, experience in the field, and the matters he elevates as issues of highest value and importance. His well-organized thinking is a reflection of his own strategy in disciple-making and ministry within the church. He fleshes things out in pursuit of a much needed guidance to practical application within the local gathering of Christ-followers. Chan's main contributions revolve around four major aspects or driving forces for the fulfillment of the Great Commission and their application: intentionality, clarity of vision, action, and multiplication.

[32] Edmund Chan was the senior pastor of many years of Covenant Evangelical Free Church in Singapore – a church that grew from 250 to over 6,000 with a core commitment to intentional disciple-making strategies. The author of this thesis-project had the privilege to visit this church in January 2023 together with his classmates and professors as part of their third year doctoral studies residency.

Chan's ministry and the church he has led for a few decades in Singapore have pioneered not only an idea, but a whole movement that they have defined as *Intentional Disciplemaking Church*. Chan outlines *intentionality* as a core motivation if a church, in its raison d'être, is truly committed to disciple-making. He puts a finger on a problem within the church that he feels is vitally important to address. Mission statements and slogans that involve discipleship and disciple-making abound but within churches "intentional disciplemaking is the exception rather than the norm."[33] As it has been already argued from the writings of Coleman, a biblical vision for disciple-making is vital to the fulfillment of the Great Commission. Nevertheless, mere vision serves no purpose unless it is undergirded by an intentional pursuit of its fulfillment. Chan lists "vision-casting alone, without mapping out a strategic work plan" as one of the main things that compromise the vision.[34]

In Chan's writings, the importance of intentionality is interwoven into every aspect of disciple-making – from vision to commitment, to strategizing and planning, to leading and training. In light of the present thesis-project, the role of intentionality could be understood as essential in at least two ways. First, it is a fundamental commitment for a local church to return to a biblical understanding of its existence and calling and, as a result, to embrace disciple-making as the vision that drives everything the church does. A local church that has lost or ignored the biblical foundation for its calling and has failed to fulfill the Great Commission is certainly not beyond hope. A lost vision could be recaptured and this is precisely the aim of this project – to intentionally seek to help local Gypsy churches in Bulgaria in (re)gaining the vision and making first steps in intentional disciple-making.

[33] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 76.

[34] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 69.

Second, from a purely practical point of view, for a local church it takes nothing less than intentionality in establishing a plan for disciple-making and developing the strategy for accomplishing it. Here Chan is very helpful. It is a matter of fact that disciple-making does not take place automatically. Churches and church leaders have to be proactive in pursuing it and shaping all the ministry of the church to revolve around the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The success of evangelism hangs on the ability of the local church to make itself available to the work of the Holy Spirit in equipping the saints for the ministry of the gospel. So, the spiritual development, growth and equipping of Christ-followers is central to the cause of Christ. Chan confirms that such "growth does not come by chance, neither it is haphazard."[35] Instead, "intentional growth strategies are in place for developing the entire church in authentic discipleship and disciplemaking."[36] While Coleman offers the invaluable focus on the principles, Chan gets more into specific application of those principles and offers guidance on practical ways of intentionally pursuing disciple-making. Intentionality is in fact a basic characteristic of life itself. And it is required virtually in anything the local church does that is geared towards making disciples of Jesus – follow-up with new believers, casting a vision, developing leadership, establishing a network of small groups. Conversely, lack of intentionality reinforces the activity of the church in going through the motions and achieving little of eternal relevance.

Intentionality is the driving force for disciple-making but just by being intentional the church would not achieve much unless it also has a *clear vision*. In fact, a clear vision turns intentional steps into something meaningful. Intentionality and vision go hand in hand. In chapter 1, the lack of vision and intentionality was listed among the ten major observations on

[35] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 56.

[36] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 57.

the characteristics and ministry of local Gypsy churches in Bulgaria. So again, Chan's exploration of these issues is particularly relevant to the present project. Chan addresses what seems to be a common challenge and flaw in the local church – a misplaced focus of the leadership on "solving problems instead of providing a vision."[37] Chan affirms that determining vision is "this most important task of leadership" which is "also arguably the most difficult."[38] Obviously, without a clear direction, it is hard for the church to find its way and to pursue disciple-making, or any other ministry for that matter. This is to say that "without leadership vision, the whole organisation is lost at sea."[39] Among the most common issues that easily compromise vision Chan lists a few that are particularly relevant to local Gypsy churches in Bulgaria: lack of vision, working with a vague sense of vision, using someone else's vision, lack of perseverance and no appreciation for process, as well as becoming sidetracked by busyness and other interruptions and distractions.[40] Finally, Chan's huge emphasis on the indispensible role of a clear vision reflects his look into the future since vision is by definition a projection into what lies ahead. Formulating and adopting a vision and pursuing a clear vision could be a tremendous challenge bordering the impossible for ethnicities and communities of Christ-followers whose existence and survival are rooted in the past and extend only as far as the here-and-now. This may well be one of the highest and hardest obstacles to overcome for Gypsy leaders and their faith communities in Bulgaria and an area of highest importance to be addressed in training them to commit to disciple-making and mobilizing them for action.

[37] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 66.

[38] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 66.

[39] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 66.

[40] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 66-71. In fact, Chan lists twelve things that, in his understanding, compromise vision. Any church would benefit tremendously from an exploration of this list as an evaluation tool for its own vision.

With the end goal in mind and an intentional pathway to achieving it, it is time for *action*. Chan does not conclude the matter of disciple-making to merely having a clear vision and the intention to pursue it. Often the local church settles in its patterns of existence and focuses on dealing with the more immediate challenges of the day. The monotony of daily life and conducting of worship services takes over and can easily hijack a clear vision and the intent to fulfill it. In this regard, Chan is very practical and insists strongly on application. He identifies the issue of non-action as problematic: "We are satisfied with mere appearances. We simply go through the motions."[41] In local churches, attention is certainly given to the Great Commission and the subject of disciple-making finds it place on church materials and mission statements. Nevertheless, "we have *a church of discipleship programmes* but fail to produce *a church of disciples*."[42]

Chan's more detailed observation and evaluation of the current church state of affairs vis-à-vis the Great Commission and its non-fulfillment is depressing but not beyond remedy. And that remedy, according to Chan, involves making a series of specific commitments to determine and empower leaders and the church for action.[43] Chan urges for a radical commitment both to the Great Commandment and to the Great Commission. He also underlines spiritual maturity as the goal, not spiritual knowledge. Thus, the goal is nothing less than transformation from the inside out that results in a person's belief system that is "anchored in the Word and on God's

[41] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 97.

[42] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 99.

[43] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 99-103. Chan offers a list of ten commitments a disciple-making church is to make in order to put into action the pursuit of a vision for disciple-making. The next few lines of this chapter provide a summary of these ten points but the reader will be well off to pick up Chan's fuller description of each of these disciple-making commitments.

promises, purposes and priorities," followed by "long-lasting behavioral changes."[44] Chan also deems as critical the development of a "sound church infrastructure for a disciplemaking church," in which church cells can provide a suitable context and make possible individual care and attention.[45] In addition, Chan rightly considers accountability as the required catalyst for growth. And finally, none of this would ever produce any lasting results without the development of leaders and pursuing a strategy of multiplication.

Ministry endeavors often reflect a clear vision and intentionality geared towards action. Where ministries fail to produce long-term impact is in the lack of *multiplication*. Great intentions and strategies are short-lived and end up being ultimately fruitless unless they are being perpetuated. The subject of multiplication was already discussed in chapter 2 but its critical value cannot be overstated and deserves some additional attention. Chan addresses its importance throughout his whole book. He echoes Robert E. Coleman and his tremendous focus on the calling and training of the twelve apostles as leaders who will disciple others and so "the chain effect will be multiplied downwards."[46] A true disciple of Jesus naturally bears much fruit (John 15:2, 5, 8), equips those around (Ephesians 4:12), and multiplies.[47] Along with spiritual maturity, Chan sees spiritual multiplication as part of the "the litmus test of an intentional disciplemaking church."[48]

More than obviously, multiplication requires (a lot of) time and is future-driven which again presents a challenge when it comes to seeking to mobilize Gypsy church leaders to initiate

[44] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 101.

[45] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 102-103.

[46] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 101.

[47] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 183-184.

[48] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 59.

disciple-making in their local churches and aim at and look forward to multiplying their disciple-making efforts with the future in view. To restate Chan's timeframe estimation, for many churches it takes five to seven years to capture the vision for intentional disciple-making and to embrace it as their core commitment and ministry.[49] Yet, multiplication remains the Master's plan and the only viable way to create an ever-increasing multitude of Christ-followers who are ready to share the gospel with a lost world. Chan is absolutely right with his focus beyond the present and even beyond the foreseeable earthly future when he says that "a disciplemaking Church is indeed investing in eternity. It is built to last!"[50]

Needed: Leaders

Disciple-making can only be carried out by people. This is why Jesus devoted most of his ministry life to the training of the apostles and "he literally staked his whole ministry on them."[51] Coleman's evaluation on the critical role of people is compelling: "Men were to be his method of winning the world to God."[52] He adds that "everything that is done with the few is for the salvation of the multitudes" because "the multitudes can be won easily if they are just given leaders to follow."[53] Coleman's pioneering thought is followed by others who further understand and underscore the critical place of leaders in disciple-making and flesh out the role of leaders in the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the challenges they are to expect in the enterprise. Here, Bill Hull joins the discussion with his book *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body*

[49] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 94.

[50] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 87.

[51] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 25.

[52] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 21.

[53] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 30-31.

Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith.[54] Hull's writings are well grounded in the biblical text and their theological foundation. What is more, they also offer a valuable reflection on the contemporary context of the church at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. Hull's observations reflect not only his thinking but also his experience in the church when it comes to providing practical guidance. Hull addresses two areas of particular interest and relevance to this thesis-project and its implementation: one, the need for and role of leaders in disciple-making; two, the challenge and danger of a church's hijacked commitment to the Great Commission.

Hull stresses the indispensible presence and ministry of leaders in the disciple-making endeavors of the local church – leaders who understand and commit to the cause of making disciples of Jesus. He raises a question that may at first appear trite but it is in fact a profound one, that every local church would be well off asking itself if it truly wants to be obedient to God and to his commands: "*Christ is the head of the body, but what do we do now?*"[55] Hull's own response to this pressing question is that "what Christ was to the disciples, the leadership team is to the congregation."[56]

As to this response, a distinctive view of Hull on the role of a leadership team is worth noting. Christ's relation to his disciples demonstrated a Christocentric model in which a single person (Jesus) related to and trained individuals and a group (the apostles). Hull underlines the difference between the reality of Jesus' own ministry and the ministry context of the church after Jesus. He notes that in Jesus was concentrated all the authority and divine ability to pour his life

[54] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1990).

[55] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 38.

[56] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 39.

perfectly into his disciples' lives, which is not the case with leaders today "because no one has the full arsenal of spiritual gifts and wisdom to adequately bring another to maturity in Christ."[57] This does not mean that Hull rejects the value of and benefits from the one-on-one disciple-making approach. However, Hull argues for a "churchocentric model" in which the leaders relate to the congregation in a holistic manner bringing together a fuller range of experiences and gifts to offer to those being trained in discipleship. In other words, "what Christ was to the disciples, the leadership team is to the congregation"[58] in the post-resurrection reality of the ministry of the church. Adopting a churchocentric view and approach to disciple-making in the local church implies that "a leadership team coaches a multilevel, diverse congregation toward maturity."[59]

The critical role of leaders cannot be overstated. Hull's remarks speak directly to one of the main challenges within local Gypsy churches in Bulgaria – the lack of a leadership body and the lack of involvement of others in leadership roles, which were already discussed in chapter 1 as distinctive features of Gypsy churches. Hull makes it clear that the loss of vitality and strength in many local churches is a direct result of ceasing to produce new leaders. This is in fact one of the most essential obligations of the church leader – to equip the saints in Christ-likeness and readiness for ministry (Ephesians 4:12). So, Hull insists that a "community of loyalists – zealots, if you will – must be produced" and only a "development of an ever-increasing leadership community insures the church's future."[60] Again, this thesis-project is directed exactly towards training and mobilizing existing pastors and church leaders to initiate disciple-making efforts within their local communities of faith and train a first generation of disciples who would in turn

[57] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 38.

[58] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 39.

[59] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 40.

[60] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 45.

start training others in their congregations. Hull's conviction is that without the development of leaders, "reproduction does not exist, and multiplication cannot occur."[61] Of course, for such leadership to be developed, the church needs to reconsider its view on the role of leaders and congregation and nothing less than a decentralization of the church body will be required.

The Danger Of Ministry Hijacking

The pressing need for training of church leaders for the fulfillment of the Great Commission is unquestionable. While this main issue is settled, Hull raises a second major concern as to a particular challenge and a danger associated with leaders who are dedicated to disciple-making within the local church. There is no doubt that leading a local church is a time-consuming and burdensome task. It involves a wide range of responsibilities, areas of operation, and never-ending challenges. It is demanding on every single level! Disciple-making, no matter how highly estimated, can be but one of the concerns of church leaders. Looking at scriptural precedents from the life and ministry of Jesus and the early apostles, Hull recognizes the challenge and warns about the danger of what he describes as ministry hijacking. A sustained focus on the vision and its fulfillment was what characterized Jesus' ministry. He constantly found himself in situations that demanded his attention and could easily pull him away to cater endlessly to the immediate needs of the masses instead of staying on track and pursuing his mission. Yet, Jesus never got distracted in his focus on his disciples. To use Coleman's words, "on his way to Calvary, He made sure that His disciples were equipped by strategy and vision to gather the harvest."[62] Furthermore, Hull offers an insightful discussion on the incident in the early church in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 6:1-6. Hull demonstrates how the apostles did not

[61] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 45.

[62] Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 64.

allow a side issue to hijack their commitment to the proclamation of the Word and the spread of the gospel. They made a conscious decision to delegate the ministry of care for the widows to a qualified group of people and commissioned them with full confidence in their ability and readiness to serve. Most importantly, since the apostles did not fall prey to the messianic syndrome,[63] they were not distracted by the challenge they faced and they did not succumb to the danger of abandoning or weakening their primary dedication to spreading the Good News.

Hull draws attention to the result from the apostles' decision and the "supremely important connection," which Luke seems to purposefully report at the end of his account of the incident: God blessed their work and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly (Acts 6:7).[64] The apostles clearly and decidedly demonstrated their true and deep convictions about their calling by not allowing the incident to derail their commitment and to prevent them from discipling.[65] Hull also offers practical advice as two principles that he finds emerging from the incident. These two principles would be an important teaching point in the training of Gypsy leaders in Bulgaria because they could be vision-savers in the face of vision-hijacking threat: First, "Do not sacrifice your primary task to handle a secondary issue,"[66] which for church leaders is basically an affirmation of the need to stay on track and stick to their primary commitment to the Great Commission. And second, "Multiply yourself through others,"[67] which again brings up the all-important issue of training disciples with a view of multiplication.

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[63] The "messianic syndrome" could be a way describing the tendency of many church and para-church leaders to take themselves as the only ones capable, gifted, and able to lead, decide, solve problems, thus often thinking of themselves not only as indispensible but also as irreplaceable as messiahs of the church.

[64] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 84-85.

[65] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 213.

[66] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 84.

[67] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 84.

The threat of ministry hijacking is more real than it may appear. While Acts 6 reports a success story, Hull draws attention to another point of the development of the early church, also reported in the book of Acts that paints a different picture. Within about five years from its beginnings, the Jerusalem church forgot its mandate to go to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Then, "it took a persecution to do what they had planned to do but had never gotten around to"[68] (Acts 8:1). Obviously, the demands of daily life and ministry obligations had taken over and had pushed the Jerusalem church downhill on the slippery slope of a hijacked commitment to the Great Commission. The leaders of today's local church can certainly learn from their predecessors in order to avoid a derailed disciple-making ministry that has no relevance to eternity! Hull's contributions to the discussion are invaluable and their practical dimension and applicability are specifically pertinent to the training of Gypsy church leaders to initiate disciple-making in their local faith communities in Bulgaria.

Diamonds In The Rough

The scriptural accounts provide the pattern for disciple-making. A clear vision defines the road ahead and leaders committed to the Great Commission intentionally pursue its fulfillment without losing their focus on God's calling and his kingdom mandate. The context for it all is the local gathering of Christ-followers who are to be trained as disciples and in turn as disciple-makers. At this point, Jim Putman with his book *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*[69] adds one final piece to the puzzle of disciple-making as it relates to the training of Gypsy pastors and mobilizing them for intentionally pursuing the fulfillment of the Great Commission in their local congregations.

[68] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 151.

[69] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010).

Jim Putman stands out with his simplicity and clarity of writing. His commitment to disciple-making is unwavering and he brings to the table his experience as a disciple-maker and pastor within a local church context. His writings display his passion for the Great Commission. In his book, Putman addresses two specific disciple-making issues that need to be heeded: the role of the local church congregation and the foundational context of relationships in the disciple-making process.

The goal of the Great Commission is to produce disciples who are the workforce for world evangelism. As already established, none of this can take place without leaders. However, on the other side of the equation stand the people in the local church who are to be trained as disciples and as disciple-makers. The training of leaders is not a goal in itself. It is a means to an end, namely that leaders could further pour their lives into individuals and groups of Christ-followers within the local faith community. It is from these individuals that more and more leaders could be established and launched for the task of disciple-making with a view of a reproducible process. What all this means is that disciple-making and the fulfillment of the Great Commission are impossible without the people in the local congregation. So is evangelism and reaching the world with the gospel! Putman defines the conundrum by saying that "the church is God's team. Those on His team work together under His direction to accomplish the goal of taking light to a dark planet."[70]

Putman argues that most believers in the local church are unable to share the gospel and to reach out to the lost people around them because of a skewed understanding about the Christian life and mission. He identifies the root of the problem in the saddening fact that "most

[70] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 21-22.

believers are not equipped to do more than attend church."[71] As already mentioned earlier, for a transformation to gradually take place, nothing less than decentralization of the church body will suffice. In this regard, the first role of pastors and church leaders would be to recognize the local congregation for its tremendous but dormant potential. And then, to embrace the local gathering of Christ-followers not only as attendees of worship services but as the people of God filled with and empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish God's kingdom purposes. Putman's conviction in this regard is central to disciple-making. He argues that leaders are already positioned by God *within* the local congregation but they are simply not identified, equipped and commissioned. Instead, they are left to become accustomed to passivity and to the belief that they have nothing to offer for the church to be successful and for the kingdom of God to advance.[72] Putman's evaluation is absolutely worth the longer quote:

> But I am passionately committed to discipleship within the church, and I am just as passionate in my conviction that when done right, discipleship will produce the leaders every church needs to succeed. God has placed leaders *within* every church because He cares for the people the church needs to reach. These leaders often sit in the pews, waiting to be developed, to be released into ministry, but often they never are. Our churches are filled with diamonds in the rough, and when pastors and church leaders begin to take seriously our mandate to disciple our people, these leaders will emerge.[73]

Diamonds in the rough! Putman's metaphor is just brilliant. It is profound in every way and his comments underline at least two important realities. First, disciple-making originates with God and God is the one who orchestrates the details of his plan, including the presence of people ready to be trained and used by him for expanding his kingdom. Second, Putman raises no doubt whatsoever that if church leaders recognize the potential in people and just initiate efforts to disciple them, leaders will in fact emerge. Putman's personal context is within the

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[71] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 22.

[72] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 22-23.

[73] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 18-19.

United States and he is largely addressing the status quo in American churches, but his argument extends far beyond the United States and speaks directly to any pastor and church leader in any church around the globe, including the local Gypsy pastors and church leaders in Bulgaria. Putman advances not only his strong conviction about the indispensible role of the congregation for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, but he also writes about the all-important context in which any disciple-making can be initiated and flourish.

It's All In The Relationship

Already in the 1960s, Robert E. Coleman formulated one of the fundamental principles of disciple-making – the Principle of Association, which was already outlined earlier in this chapter. It reflects Jesus' consistent practice of drawing his disciples to him and spending time with them. In the context of most natural daily relationship, Jesus gave to his disciples the opportunity to learn from him and to make one step after another in their spiritual journey. It may not be an overstatement to argue that the Principle of Association is the central principle around which revolve the other principles Coleman formulates. Selection of disciples is for the purpose of relationship and training. Consecration and the pursuit of Christ-likeness are in relation to God himself and also find expression in one's interactions with others. Demonstration, delegation, and supervision are simply impossible if there is no established relationship between discipler and disciple. Reproduction is not a mechanistic process but it is also based on existing relationships.

To bring back Bill Hull into this discussion, he laments over the current state of the church in which "only a small minority of members are living in any meaningful accountable

relationships."[74] Hull identifies this as large part of the evidence for the great omission of the church today: not making discipleship a priority. He insists that disciples of Jesus should not only go to worship services together but should live life together.[75]

Jim Putman also gives the subject of relationship a lot of due attention. He draws from the example of Jesus who was with his disciples "because His relationship with them was the conduit by which He could deliver all that they needed."[76] Jesus intentionally chose his training methods, which "were relational in nature… because He understood that more is 'caught' than 'taught' and this is how Jesus "invested His life in the Twelve."[77] In Putman's view, the relationship makes the message real and provides the context for real teaching, shepherding, transparency, and accountability. Along with intentionality and a reproducible process, he lists relationship as one of the three keys to success in disciple-making.[78] To be sure, relationships are far from being an accessory to the fulfillment of the Great Commission and they go far beyond the time of a corporate worship service. Learning and spiritual growth by only listening to sermons and corporate gatherings are impossible.[79] Lower and higher attendance of corporate worship gatherings are the two sides of a coin. In the case of Gypsy churches in Bulgaria, the series of endless worship services eats up the church goers' time and hinders ministry outside the corporate worship settings, precluding the possibility for disciple-making individually or in a

[74] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 226.

[75] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 226-227.

[76] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 48.

[77] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 49.

[78] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 35.

[79] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 47-48. Putman refers to assessments he is aware of, according to which Christians attend corporate worship services only 1.6 times a month. Obviously, discipleship and disciple-making which rely on learning and spiritual growth only based on worship service attendance are destined to fail.

small group. Putman is convinced that "discipleship demands intentionality and relationship."[80] In fact, Putman grasps well the deep significance of the relational context of disciple-making which leads him to conclude that "without true relationship, discipleship is not possible."[81]

Putman summarizes his argument for the importance of the relational context for any discipleship and disciple-making to be possible in a beautiful paragraph deserving full attention:

> Discipleship requires real teaching and real learning. It requires conversation, modeling, encouragement, debriefing, and practice, all of which need to happen in the context of relationship. Without relationship between believers, there is no model to follow, no authenticity, no accountability, no application, and no support for the journey. These things come through personal contact. And because that relational context for learning is lacking, life change is much rarer than it should be among Christians today.[82]

Finally, Putman ventures to establish relationality as an expression of spiritual maturity and a reflection of the disciple's love for God and for others. This should not be a surprise since love, ministry, mission, and discipleship itself are relational categories. In Putman's own words: "Christians who are spiritually mature are relational – they love God and they love others. Their character tends to reflect the character of Christ more and more. They are servants of Christ and they serve Him by serving others with something tangible. Their resources, abilities, time, and money are at His disposal so that He can complete His mission through them."[83] Jim Putman's contribution to the field of disciple-making and to the formulation and completion of this present thesis-project is undeniable. He offers a lot to reflect on and apply in practice, especially in a challenging context like the Gypsy church community in Bulgaria.

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[80] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 23.

[81] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 47.

[82] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 22-23.

[83] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 44.

A Final Word

Each of these leading authors and experienced practitioners of disciple-making offered unique insights into the origins, biblical imprint, vision and commitment to the fulfillment of the Great Commission in our day and age. Robert E. Coleman explicitly emphasized the critical need to follow the Master and his plan by sticking to the intransient principles in his incarnate life and ministry. Edmund Chan underlined the critical role of a clear vision and intentionality in disciple-making geared towards multiplication. Bill Hull offered a much needed focus on the need for and critical role of leadership teams to provide a churchocentric model for the disciple-making church and to protect the church from a disciple-making vision hijacking. And finally, Jim Putman provided a take on the "diamonds in the rough" thus highlighting the indispensible role of the church congregation in the fulfillment of the Great Commission as well as the relational basis on which any disciple-making can take place and thrive.

The combined input from these thinkers is invaluable not only to a fuller understanding of the disciple-making enterprise of the church vis-à-vis the mandate of the Great Commission of Jesus. It also provides useful practical guidance for the training of Gypsy pastors and church leaders as disciple-makers and for mobilizing them for making intentional and practical steps to disciple the next generation of leaders within their local communities of faith.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

This thesis-project, *Mobilizing Gypsy Church Leaders for Initiating Intentional Disciple-Making Efforts in Their Local Faith Communities,* was conducted over a one-month period and consisted of four consecutive four-hour weekly course sessions. The goal of the project was to gather a group of indigenous Gypsy pastors and church leaders and to engage them into an exploration of the Great Commission and the principles of disciple-making from the life and ministry of Jesus and from the example of the early church. The course meetings allowed the group to study and grow together in their knowledge of Jesus' mandate to the church to make disciples, to discuss practical ways in which they could fulfill the Great Commission as well as to be encouraged to initiate disciple-making efforts in their local congregations.

The hypothesis behind the project was that a formal training will incite Gypsy pastors and church leaders to begin investing themselves in the lives of others in their churches by pursuing intentional disciple-making. This hypothesis was based on the premise that learning and training inform and encourage practice. Without personal experience of being discipled and without an understanding of the Great Commission, Christ's plan and strategy for reaching the world with the gospel, and the need for the church to make discipleship and disciple-making a priority, it would be unreasonable to expect Gypsy church leaders, or anyone else for that matter, to get involved in disciple-making. The author's deepest conviction was that each participant would be led by the Holy Spirit to register and participate in the training and his deepest hope was that none of the participants who completed the course would leave indifferent to the fulfillment of the Great Commission and would make their first steps in disciple-making.

Project Team Formation

The planning for the project began in the Spring of 2023, no less than six months before its launching in September 2023. The author saw in the project more than completing it for the sake of the pastors and church leaders who were ultimately trained. It was also an opportunity to invite others to be involved in a ministry of critical importance. In addition, very early in the development of the project, the author became aware that both its preparation and its completion would require the help of a team. These circumstances aligned very well with the author's theological conviction that Christian ministry is not and should not be an individual enterprise. So, a team of three members joined the author and conducted regular meetings from the very beginning of planning and strategizing for the project to its completion. The team members were all from non-Gypsy background. One of the team members was a Christ-follower whom the author had trained in discipleship for two years prior to this thesis-project. The author shared with him his vision about disciple-making and training of Gypsy church leaders, which turned into an invitation to become a part of the team. The other team members were two Christ-followers in their twenties, who were invited to join the project as an opportunity to get involved in ministry. In addition, their participation in the team was a great asset in terms of their experience as younger people and their greater familiarity with contemporary technology. Moreover, a few volunteers also gave of their time and provided much needed help with some of the logistical tasks like workbook binding, securing refreshments for the participants, and the weekly setting up of the conference room in which the project was carried out. These volunteers were Christ-followers who came from the author's personal circle of friends to whom the author extended a personal appeal for help. The importance of teamwork can hardly be overemphasized. The formation of the team and its work over several months was in itself a work of disciple-

making. Through the process of working together with the author, the team members were able to immerse themselves in learning and reflecting on the Great Commission and the importance and goals of disciple-making. The team members and the volunteers took an active part of the course as all other course participants.

The Course Invitation

The official title of the course was *"The Great Commission – How to Make Disciples of Jesus."* The invitation, the registration, and communication with course participants were for the author a pilot project and a test for future ministry. They presented a challenge in the sense that he had to take into account the technological advancements of today's day and age and to utilize contemporary means of communication all the while being unsure of how much such an approach would resonate with Gypsies. In the early summer of 2023, in anticipation of the project, the author set up a Facebook group with the name *Koinonia Center* in which, for the first two months, he posted daily publications primarily focused on different aspects of spiritual growth and disciple-making. The goal of the group was to first create content and achieve a certain level of traffic in order to establish an online presence and to allow people from various Christian traditions and ethnicity to join the group from different parts of the country and from abroad and to be exposed to disciple-making subjects of great importance. The goal of the group was advertised as promoting the fulfillment of the Great Commission. By the time of the launching of the course, the Facebook group had grown to over two hundred members.

The author penned an invitation that was reviewed by the team and, after minor corrections, it was disseminated in two ways – hard copies (Appendix A) and online. Sending letters by mail was not an option because the team neither had a database with addresses of local

pastors and church leaders, nor could it trust the unreliable local postal service. Instead, in the beginning of August 2023, the author and one of the team members reached out to key Gypsy pastors that they knew personally from the past and arranged for individual meetings with them. A batch of copies of the invitation letter was given to each one of them and they made further contacts with church leaders in their own churches and other local church leaders in their neighborhoods and more general areas. In addition, one of the team members, a graphic designer, produced a set of high-quality invitations based on discipleship and disciple-making themes that the author posted online gradually along with essential information about the course. Both the hard copy invitations and their online version were shared more specifically with Gypsy leaders but were also made available to the general population of local Bulgarian churches and church leadership as there was no way to single out church leaders of Gypsy churches at the exclusion of all others.

The invitation included an introduction touching on the need for a viable strategy for reaching the world with the Good News, information about the place and time of the course, main course topics, requirements for completion, registration and fee information, and finally a brief introduction of the author as the main teacher for the course.

The Course Registration Process

The registration process presented a dual challenge. On the one hand, prospective course participants had no way of sending hard copy registration forms back to the team. On the other hand, the author and the team worried about participants bringing unregistered participants along on the first day of the sessions. The latter would have been fully expected as part of Gypsy culture but it would have created a major hurdle with regards to the capacity and limitations of

the conference room and the prepared sets of course materials. A decision was made to create an online registration form (Appendix B) and urge all prospective course participants to use it as the only way to register. This turned out to be a fitting solution to the dual problem. Nevertheless, an option was provided for participants to contact the team over the phone in order to be registered in case they had no access to the Internet or experienced difficulty filling out the online form.

In terms of its content, the registration form[1] clearly stated again the timeframe and place for the course and inquired about basic information in order to identify the participant's name, location, church and contact information. At this time, the author missed the opportunity to inquire about the age of the participants but each participant gladly shared this information later at the sign-up table before the first session of the course. One of the most important questions was about the role of the participant in his/her church because the course was clearly addressed to pastors, preachers, elders, youth leaders and people on any other leadership position within their local church. In order to avoid confusion, this question was shaped as a multiple-choice one with six possible answers. Another important question asked the participants to indicate the best way for them to communicate through the most popular online applications in Bulgaria (Viber and WhatsApp). The responses to this question allowed the author to set up closed groups on both applications and to communicate information to the registered participants before the beginning of the course, during the weeks between the course sessions, and after the completion of the course. This proved to be a critical factor in making sure that registered participants did not forget about the beginning of the course or miss important information along the four course

[1] The author had never created online forms before the need emerged for this project but was very pleased with the practicality and usefulness online forms offer. After a brief exploration of the possibilities, the online registration form was created using the Google Forms application, which was found to be very functional and easy to use in creating the form, filling out the form, and working with the submitted information.

sessions. The registration form also contained one open-ended question asking about possible preliminary questions the participants would have about disciple-making.

The form was intentionally prepared to be as simple to use as possible in order to avoid any confusion and complications. A few of the team members registered by using the form in order to test its usefulness and ease of use before an online link was published and shared with prospective participants. On average, it took around one minute to complete the form and the author received an immediate email notification for each registration. In addition, the online platform allowed for the automatic generation of an electronic file with a list of the participants and their answers to the questions, which was easily used later for both contact purposes and analysis of the participants' answers.[2]

Registration Follow-Up

The author's previous experience in ministry among Gypsies and personal interaction with Gypsy church leaders made him well aware of the need for registration follow-up in order to avoid the possibility of prospective course participants registering and then forgetting about the course or taking other responsibilities on the dates of the course sessions. After receiving the registration form, the author contacted immediately over the phone each registered participant and confirmed the receipt of their registration. This step played an important role and provided a double benefit. First, it served as a confirmation of the registration and demonstrated the personal interest of the author (and teacher) in each participant. Second, it also allowed the author to establish more personal initial contact, especially with those whom the author had not met before the course. Next, one week before the beginning of the first meeting, a team member contacted

[2] The Google platform offered an automatically created Excel file, which listed all answers by question and allowed for sorting out and editing of the information with all the functionality of a regular Excel file. The file could be also downloaded and saved.

by phone each registered participant – a step that proved to be highly important for Gypsy participants to be reminded of the upcoming course.

The Participants

The initial aim of the author while envisioning the project was to gather a group of 10-15 Gypsy church leaders for disciple-making training. However, the invitation, both through hard copy letters and online, quickly created more interest than expected. As a result, a much larger number of participants were registering. At that point, the author and the team had to make a decision about either limiting the total number of the class or allowing more and more participants to register. One concern with a larger number of the group was that it would decrease the opportunity for more personal interactions and would lower the quality of the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, the team was concerned that this unique opportunity to train local Gypsy leaders may not present itself again very soon, which would deprive a number of prospective participants from the opportunity to be trained. Finally, the decision was reached to allow as many participants to join, as the capacity of the conference room would allow. As a result, the registration process generated thirty-one in-person participants.[3]

The author's theological conviction about incarnational ministry was the reason why he planned the project strictly as an in-person course. And this is how the course was advertised. However, over the course of extending the invitation and the registration process, the author and his team were stretched in an unexpected way. They received a few inquiries about online participation from the capital of Bulgaria, close to 200 miles away from the author's ministry

[3] As already mentioned, the team members and volunteers took part of the course as well. However, for the sake of this thesis-project, the author includes in the number of registered participants only the Gypsy pastors and church leaders who were the subject and focus of this thesis-project.

area and course location, as well as from Bulgarian Gypsy immigrants in Berlin, Germany. Considering the fact that the inquiries came from church leaders who may never have the opportunity to benefit from disciple-making training, the author and the team decided to accept the challenge and allow these participants to register and join the group online. Due to limited financial resources for the project, the team could not take advantage of paid platforms for online networking and instead had to use a free version of an application, which still allowed for a flawless connection.[4] Although the inquiries about online participation presented an unexpected challenge, they also opened a whole new horizon for the author and his team in terms of future ministry and pastoral training that could reach those who live at a distance and fit well within the contemporary technological developments and trends in communication and networking. In the end, the author was very pleased with the overall outcome from the online participation.

The combined number of registered in-person and online participants amounted to thirty-six. Most of them came from Gypsy ghettos and nearby villages and towns densely populated by Gypsies around the larger city of Sliven. The in-person participants from the farthest location came from the town of Karnobat – about 40 miles away. Seventeen churches were represented from nine different locations.[5] Of all registered participants, unfortunately only three were women.[6]

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[4] The team did a lot of preliminary preparation for the online streaming of the course. Connections and Internet quality were checked in advance. For this additional and unplanned part of the project the team used the Google Meet app. After the first Saturday of class meeting and cutting the online streaming to segments of about an hour, the author and the team made additional testing and discovered that the one-hour free streaming limitation somehow did not apply and the connection could continue uninterrupted for hours at a time. This was great relief and allowed for a much smoother flow of the following three Saturday class meetings.

[5] The names of the churches and their locations were as follows: Zion Church – Sliven (2 participants), Grace United Christian Church of God – Topolchane village (5 participants), Congregational Church – Mladovo village (1 participant), Congregational Church – Kamen village (4 participants), El Shadai Church – Topolchane village (2 participants), Shalom Christian Evangelical Church – Topolchane village (4 participants), Bulgarian Christian Baptist Church – Hope District, Sliven (1 participant), Nazareth Church – Rechitsa village (1 participant), Congregational Church – Sliven (1 participant), Bulgarian Church of God – Topolchane village (1 participant), Resurrection Bulgarian Church of God – Elenovo village (1 participant), Zion Christian Church – Yambol (1

Meeting Time

The selection of the meeting time for carrying out the project was of crucial importance and a big factor in determining the ability to participate. Initially the author planned to conduct the project in the late Spring of 2023. Yet, he came to the realization that the task at hand was much bigger than the available timeframe for quality course preparation, so a decision was made to look forward to another time. The main factor in planning the meeting time was the fact that most (if not all) Gypsy pastors are bi-vocational. Many of them are engaged in seasonal jobs especially during the agricultural summer season. Hence, it would have been completely impossible to carry out the project during the summer months. With the school year in Bulgaria starting in the middle of September and the agricultural work coming to a close around the same time, the disciple-making course was determined to begin at that time. Another factor had to be also taken into account. Gypsy churches conduct several services, prayer meetings, and informal table fellowship each week and their weekday nights are rarely available. The only viable day and time for the project was on Saturday mornings. So, the course was spread over four Saturdays starting on September 16, 2023 and the last meeting being on October 7, 2023.

Meetings Location

Determining the location initially seemed like an easy task. Meeting in one of the three main Bulgarian churches in the city of Sliven would have been easy to arrange for. However, the author was advised by local ministers and ministry partners, that it would be more appropriate to

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participant), Spring of Life Church – Yambol (1 participant), Balkan Evangelical Church – Banya village (1 participant), Church of the Lord – Sliven (1 participant), Assemblies of God Church – Karnobat (3 participants), New Beginning Church – Karnobat (1 participant). From the online participants there were two churches represented from two locations: "Mercy Christian Center" – Berlin, Germany (4 participants) and "From Glory to Glory Church" – Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria (1 participant).

[6] These numbers and their significance will be further analyzed and discussed in the next chapter.

pick a "neutral" location. Because of church politics on the local and denominational level, choosing a church as a meeting location for the course may have pushed away some prospective participants. The author was deeply disturbed and saddened by this reality and the fact that lack of unity between churches, denominations, and local church leaders would prevent some of them from participating in a training that promotes the advancement of God's kingdom and the fulfillment of the Great Commission – none of which has anything to do with church politics. Things be as they may, the author and a team member spent several days exploring local hotels for the conditions and availability their conference rooms offered and ended up settling on a conference room capable of accommodating up to fifty people in the easily recognizable location of the Sports Palace Hotel in the city of Sliven. Renting a conference room came with a financial burden that could have been much lower or none, had the course taken place in a local church building.

Course Fee

On the surface, the course fee may not appear to be an important issue to address. However, in the context of this thesis-project, the question was truly relevant and required a careful consideration both in the development of this project and as a test with ramifications for future general ministry and disciple-making training efforts. The author's idealistic inclination was to offer the course free of charge to all participants. The rationale behind such a proposition was mainly that Gypsy pastors and church leaders live in relative poverty and many, if not most, of them may have a hard time assuming the cost for the course.

On the one hand, the author was concerned that putting a price on ministry training may deter a number of prospective participants from registering because of the inability to pay the

participation fee. On the other hand, the author had another concern. In post-communist Bulgaria, for over thirty years, the patterns of ministry have established a conviction and wide-spread practice of ministry free of charge. In stark contrast, in more recent years, the Christian community has been flooded by the prosperity movement tsunami, which produced its local prosperity preachers and teachers, for whom extracting money from people by well-devised schemes has become the norm. The author wished to avoid being associated with any such approach.

After careful consideration of the issue at hand, and after receiving valuable feedback on the question from doctoral colleagues and mentors, the author made the decision to ask all participants to pay a small, rather symbolic fee of $15 per person for the course. The rationale behind this decision was that paying a participation fee would both add some obligation to follow through and finish the course as well as add more value to the training to be offered to the participants. On the registration form, each participant had to check a box to indicate that they agreed with paying the fee upon arrival for the first session of the course. This approach set a precedent in the author's own ministry practice and established a model to be considered in further theological and disciple-making training.

Devising The Course

The author's original intention was to conduct a training for Gypsy church leaders over an extended period of time. Such an arrangement would have been an expression of the author's conviction about effective education and modeling a disciple-making process that patiently unfolds over time – much like the ministry and disciple-making work of Jesus with his disciples as revealed in the gospels. However, very early in the planning of the project it became clear that

such an approach would be counter-productive among Gypsy church leaders. Their cultural setup would not support such a long-term investment on their part and commitment to such an enterprise would be impossible for them. So, in order to take into account these cultural traits, the author made a decision to reduce the meeting time to four sessions. This decision did not come without a major compromise on the part of the author but his conviction was that the teaching material could still be taught effectively when broken down into smaller units. This would allow the participants to have a week's worth of time for ruminating on what they had learned and explored on a given Saturday. Fortunately, the course material was divided in well-defined units allowing the author to teach completed ideas on each of the Saturday sessions.

The content of the course was based on the author's own exploration of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 and used a lot of the reflections presented in this thesis-project. It also included a very detailed exploration of the principles of disciple-making from the life and ministry of Jesus and the early church, outlined in the seminal work on disciple-making *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert E. Coleman.[7] Each participant received a package of course materials which included a copy in Bulgarian of the *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, a workbook (Appendix D) especially prepared by the author of this course and a pen. An on-screen presentation provided a detailed outline of the material following closely the workbook but also including a wealth of visuals that the author believes were extremely helpful to Gypsy church leaders. The author and his team did not offer to the participants any material or other compensation for participating in the training or for filling out the course surveys. Yet, each participant who completed all the requirements for the course received a certificate of completion.

[7] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008).

The Course Surveys

For this project, the author developed two surveys – the first one to be filled out before the beginning and the second one at the end of the course. The questions on both surveys were intentionally designed to be simple and easily answerable. The author took into consideration the all-important factor that among Gypsy pastors and church leaders the level of literacy may vary widely and, if questions were formulated in a more complicated way, a number of participants would either ignore the surveys and not fill them out or answer the questions in a random manner, just to complete the surveys while avoiding any embarrassment from not fully understanding the questions asked. The two surveys contained a combination of simple "yes / no," multiple choice, and Likert scale questions. Some answers also provided the opportunity to clarify and give a more detailed written answer.

The aim of the surveys was to explore the participants' biblical knowledge on and understanding of the Great Commission and their disciple-making practices prior to the course and how the course impacted them in these areas and especially in their readiness to initiate intentional disciple-making efforts in their local congregations. As such, the two surveys played a critical role in evaluating if and how much the training achieved in helping Gypsy church leaders acquire more understanding about God's calling to make disciples of Jesus and mobilizing them to start fulfilling the Great Commission in practice. So, the surveys were the main tool for testing the basic *hypothesis* of this thesis-project and the deep hope of the author that organized formal disciple-making training would help Gypsy pastors and church leaders to acquire knowledge and mobilize them to make first steps into engaging intentionally people from their churches in discipling relationships.

Both surveys were voluntary and anonymous. However, in order to be able to track the answers, there had to be some way to identify the pre-test and post-test forms filled out by the same person. Initially, the author planned to ask the participants to indicate on the survey sheet the last three digits of their national identification number. This approach could have introduced some suspicion in the participants and would have created some reluctance to fill out the surveys. Allowing participants to pick and choose their own number was a better choice but it also risked participants doubling a number or mostly forgetting the number they picked for themselves by the end of the course and the time to fill out the post-test survey. So, the author assigned random numbers printed on the inside of the back cover of each workbook. Each participant used that number to indicate it on the first survey and then on the second one. This system allowed for maintaining anonymity and freedom to participate voluntarily, connecting each pre-test with post-test surveys all the while avoiding any confusion or forgetting of assigned numbers. The surveys were designed to take no more than 5 minutes to complete and the participants turned in their filled out forms to a team member. The online participants received links to online survey forms identical to the hard copies that they were able to fill out and submit online.

The first survey (Appendix C) was given to the participants on September 16, 2023, right before the beginning of the first course session. It dealt mainly with questions about the participants' current knowledge and understanding of the Great Commission and the idea of making disciples of Jesus, their prior experience of being discipled and of making disciples, how much focus on disciple-making they have had in their preaching and teaching, if they had received any previous training on disciple-making, and if they were currently discipling someone.

The second survey (Appendix E) was given to the participants on October 7, 2023 at the end of the last session. It replicated a few of the questions from the first survey but also introduced a series of questions evaluating to what degree the course helped the participants to gain more knowledge on and understanding of the Great Commission and its calling, as well as to what degree the training encouraged and prepared the participants to engage people in disciple-making relationships, and finally, the level of readiness to commit to making disciples after the end of the course. The participants were also invited to share about what they found to be the most valuable part of the course as well as if there were something they would have loved to learn about that the course did not address.

Session 1: The Great Commission and the Principles of Incarnation and Selection

The first session took place on September 16, 2023. For the first class meeting the participants were asked to arrive thirty minutes early in order to be checked-in, receive their name tags, and pay the participation fee. The conference room was rented for a four-hour timeframe, so beginning on time was of essence. The author and the team expected that most participants would arrive in the last minute or late. However, to their utter surprise, participants began flooding the lobby of the hotel thirty minutes before the beginning of the first session, just as they had been instructed. This in itself was a wonderful indication of self-discipline and commitment that run counter-culturally for the Gypsy community. By the time of the actual beginning, all participants were seated and patiently waiting. Each participant received their package of course materials. The online participants received an electronic version of the workbook and hard copies of the required reading were shipped to them prior to the beginning of

the course. After checking in, the participants were given the opportunity to fill out the pre-test survey.

At the official start of the first session, a designated team member welcomed the participants and opened the meeting with prayer. Then the author began teaching with a brief introduction to evangelism aiming at positioning the Great Commission and the call to disciple-making in the context of the grand vision of Jesus for reaching to the whole world with the gospel. He reflected on the Great Commission not as a goal in itself but as the roadmap to world evangelism by preparing the workforce for global outreach. After a moment for silent reflection, the author took time to present the course syllabus and what the participants were to expect for that day and for the following three meetings. He also provided clarification on the requirements to complete the course successfully.

In the first major unit of the material, the author presented a very detailed exploration of the Great Commission, addressing its setting, the specific wording recorded in Matthew 28:18-20, its main thrust and its global scope, and finally, its role as the ultimate evaluation of all ministry endeavors. The author emphasized strongly that the Great Commission's primary concern is to make disciples of Jesus, while the other actions accompany the process and are means of achieving the main goal. The author then entered into extended discussions on the meaning and role of water baptism in the Christian life and disciple-making as well as on the never ending teaching and learning process in the spiritual journey of the Christ-follower that results in spiritual growth and maturity with the goal of conforming to the image of Christ. A deep understanding of the material presented in this first unit was of critical importance as it was intended to lay a solid foundation for exploration of the principles and practices of disciple-making discussed next. The author spent a significant amount of time looking into Jesus'

declaration that all authority had been given to him in heaven and on earth and Jesus' promise of his very own presence to be with his followers as they fulfill the Great Commission. He made sure to instill from the beginning a very clear thinking about the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of disciple-making and to ensure the participants understood that at its core disciple-making is ultimately the work of God, not a human enterprise.

After this, the author explained to the participants the all-important difference between principles and methods of disciple-making and why this training focused primarily on principles as intransient fundamental propositions with timeless meaning and application, while also addressing some methods. He then established the key source of information and inspiration for disciple-making, namely the life and ministry of Jesus, recorded in the gospels, as well as the history of the early church revealed in the book of Acts. This served as a transition for the author to jump into a detailed exploration of the first two out of nine principles from the disciple-making ministry of Jesus. This whole first session was broken down into four units and the participants enjoyed three breaks during which they were able to connect with one another for fellowship as well as to engage the author in personal conversations on the subjects discussed in class and on general Bible and ministry questions.

The author continued by presenting the Principle of Incarnation. The extraordinary reality of Jesus coming among his creatures in flesh and blood, emptying himself (Philippians 2:5-11) and becoming a servant determines the role and the position Christ-followers are to assume when they engage in the work of disciple-making (and any ministry for that matter). That is why disciple-making begins at the cross! In addition, Jesus identified the problem of insufficient number of workers and provided the solution, namely praying for more workers and taking the servant's mantle to become a part of the solution. During these teaching sections and for the rest

of the whole course, the author encouraged the participants to ask questions and to share comments as the teaching was moving along. The participants asked more questions and seemed more at ease to comment as the course progressed into the second and the subsequent meetings. Due to the time constraints the conference room imposed, the author had to be careful to balance his teaching time with a reasonable amount of discussion as to be able to teach thoroughly through the material while as the same time respecting and not exceeding the announced timeframe for each meeting.

The last part of this first meeting was dedicated to an exploration of the Principle of Selection. The author stressed the fact that of all things Jesus could have done to begin his public ministry, he focused on choosing disciples that he would train for the work of God's kingdom – people who would be able to lead the multitudes. The author explored in detail the calling of Jesus' first disciples (John 1; Matthew 4:18-22) and of Matthew (Matthew 9:9:13) and the selection of the whole group of the Twelve (Luke 6:13-17) as Jesus' only plan and strategy to win the world. A fair amount of time was also spent on Jesus' criteria for selecting disciples that should inform our approach to selection of prospective disciples to be trained. Teachability was promoted as the single most important factor in selection with its implied desire and readiness to learn combined with a level of consistency and commitment. Throughout this teaching unit, the author also shared personal testimonies from his own ministry and disciple-making experience and how he has used the Principle of Selection in his mission practice.

Finally, the author emphasized prayer as the place to start in the process of looking for disciples, which is another affirmation of the fact that disciple-making is ultimately the work of God. He invited the participants to consider the example of Jesus in keeping a low profile in the selection of his disciples and in the whole process of training them. After a brief discussion on

the challenges of obsession with numbers and serving multitudes that the contemporary church is facing, the author raised the big question of how to actually start training a disciple after he/she was selected. To this big question was dedicated the next meeting and the rest of the course. This first meeting finished right on time with prayer and a number of the participants gladly stayed to help the team with tearing down the conference room and loading.

Session 2: The Principles of Association and Consecration

The second session took place on September 23, 2023. The meeting began on time and the participants were again early for the gathering for which they were highly commended. The author believes that this sets a wonderful precedent for future theological and disciple-making training for Gypsy leaders. Again, a designated team member welcomed all participants and opened with prayer. The author began his teaching with a summary review of the first session and engaged the participants in a discussion. The questions and answers allowed him to briefly test how much the participants remembered from the material covered previously and to build a bridge to the next disciple-making principles to be explored. This session was divided into only two units as it dealt with two principles and the author tried to maintain the focus of the participants on a single principle without interruptions. Nevertheless, a single break for the whole length of the meeting proved to be somewhat insufficient and prevented the participants from enjoying a little more the refreshments provided by the team in the back of the conference room.

The author turned first to the Principle of Association. One of the most easily missed aspects of Jesus' ministry is that Jesus spent time with his disciples. In fact, associating with them on a daily basis was the foundation for all learning that Jesus would offer to them over the

course of his entire public ministry. As simple as it may appear to be, this principle is easily disregarded and subverted by the contemporary church which often reduces ministry and disciple-making to events and short-term programs with little attention and opportunity to establish and build relationships. Yet, the Principle of Association is an expression of the relationship that is indispensible in the process of engaging Christ-followers in a disciple-making journey. Casual relationships are the most natural and meaningful way of learning because they are incarnational and allow for real-life interaction, application, and accountability. In addition, relationships play a key role in increasing the commitment of disciples.

Further, the author spent a good while discussing some of the factors, which play an essential role in engaging, establishing, deepening and maintaining a relationship in general and a disciple-making relationship in particular. Among those factors, the author zoomed in on the role of time, depth, and vulnerability. Moreover, he discussed the long-term goal and the process of establishing mutual trust for the success of the disciple-making journey. He pointed out the practicality of this principle and the ease with which relationships offer a double benefit for the discipler as he/she can incorporate their own spiritual disciplines into the disciple-making process with others. Finally, the author addressed the contemporary challenge that many churches are facing, namely that of little to no follow-up with new believers, where often they are left to grow spiritually on their own after their conversion. He ended this teaching unit by challenging the participants with the question: "If Jesus spent three years with his disciples, how much time are you ready to spend?"

The author devoted the entire second teaching unit of this session on the Principle of Consecration. Jesus certainly expected his disciples to learn from him but the whole point of his training was to ultimately teach his followers to be obedient. This principle brought the

participants back to the necessity to embrace the cross daily and to instill in those they will train the need to offer themselves as living sacrifices to God. The author spent a significant amount of time discussing Jesus' interaction with Peter recorded in Matthew 16 and Jesus' declaration that he will build his church. He stressed the importance of understanding that it is Christ who is *the Builder* and that he is building *his* church. This should be both a humbling and an emboldening realization, reminding Jesus' followers that their work can never fail because it is ultimately done by God himself.

The author provided further examples of particular methods that could be used in the process of training disciples like Scripture reading and study, the use of commentaries and devotional guides, Scripture memorization, readings on a variety of faith and practice-related subjects, and reaching out to others in order to start pouring one's life into the life of a disciple. Obedience was discussed as an expression of love for God, not an obligation. The author also addressed the importance of counting the cost of following Jesus and being ready to undergo a transformation in the process of discipleship. Finally, he referred to Jesus as the ultimate example of obedience to the perfect will of the Father. The meeting was closed with prayer and a number of participants volunteered again to help the team with tearing down the conference room and loading. During this second session, the participants definitely displayed more ease in asking questions and elicited more discussion. The author was pleased to see the participants engaging in meaningful exchanges with him and with one another and relating what they were learning to their life and ministry contexts.

Session 3: The Principles of Demonstration, Delegation, and Supervision

The third session took place on September 30, 2023. The author was very pleased with the pattern of punctuality established and maintained throughout the course. To the reader this may be a fact of little significance. The different value assigned to time and punctuality in a country like Bulgaria, and in the Gypsy community in particular, in which being late is the norm, could be taken simply as a different cultural trait. However, being late could also be a significant hurdle to accomplishing anything in ministry and in training church leaders. The weekly closed-group text messages to all participants with reminders to be early for the beginning of each session seem to have played a positive role in addressing the potential problem and preventing the waste of time and unnecessary pressure from running late.

This third session followed the general pattern already established on the previous two Saturday meetings. After the opening prayer, the author engaged again the participants in a brief review of the material covered to that date. The first two sessions of the course dealt mainly with foundational knowledge and principles that established God's call in the Great Commission, the nature of disciple-making and the attitude and character of the disciple-maker. They also introduced the first essential steps to training a disciple – selection and association. The third session was entirely dedicated to the study of the next three principles, all of which are of a more practical nature. The whole session was naturally divided into three teaching units of about 70-80 minutes each, with two breaks in-between. The three principles were particularly grouped together for this session as they represent an intrinsically interconnected sequence and process.

The author took a moment to discuss again the requirements for completing the course successfully, stressing the importance to persevere until the end and to put one final effort into finishing the required reading, the memorization of the assigned Bible verses, and the writing of

a farewell letter to a disciple. Despite the fact that some of the participants dropped out from the course after the first and the second sessions,[8] at this time the author was encouraged by the fact that there was already a defined core group of participants who had every chance to complete the whole course. On the one hand, this was a good sign for the overall turnout of the course itself. On the other hand, it was an important indication that the course subject and its presentation maintained the interest of and were able to raise a felt need in the participants in such a way as to keep them coming until the very end. The author also invited the participants as a whole group to practice aloud the text of Matthew 28:18:20 and provided them with practical advice on Scripture memorization.

The first teaching unit of this session was dedicated to the Principle of Demonstration. The author stressed that Jesus' key approach to teaching in his disciple-making ministry was by demonstrating the lesson, i.e. to teach more by example than by exhortation as the most natural way of teaching and learning. This basic approach of Jesus was illustrated in his way of modeling for his disciples the practice of prayer, the use of Scripture, and personal evangelism. Through demonstration, Jesus instilled in his disciples his life and mission priorities as well as the values of God's kingdom. Demonstration is based on imitation as the most basic learning mechanism engrained in any aspect of human development. Without demonstration, it would be hard for disciples to envision what it means to live out the Christian faith and to serve the Lord in practice.

Next, the author presented the Principle of Delegation. While disciples learned from the example of Jesus, they needed an opportunity to apply this knowledge in real life. This is exactly what Jesus allowed them to do by progressively delegating to them certain responsibilities and

[8] The reasons for dropping out, the numbers and all participation details will be discussed in detail in the next chapter where the outcomes will be reported and analyzed.

tasks. The disciples were able to replicate most of Jesus' own ministry and use their gifts and talents to be an active part in the ministry of God's kingdom. No church leader today can do all the ministry alone and delegation is both a way of sharing the responsibility and a principle of disciple-making which allows disciples to practice in real life what they have learned. In a way, the application of this principle was also the author's hope for the participants to return to their home churches and ministry contexts and to apply in practice everything they learned during the course. As part of his presentation, the author raised a question about the discipling of women and the delegation of responsibilities to women in the church. As expected, this turned out to be a very sensitive question for Gypsy church leaders, most of whom came from strongly male-driven church and ministry contexts. The author, who was well aware of this widespread situation in Gypsy churches, was saddened by the ease with which church leaders were ready to dismiss women as valid participants in God's kingdom ministry and the harshness with which they were ready to deny women from any kind of leadership roles in the church. Things be as they may, the author was able to at least scratch the surface of the issue with them and to allow for a meaningful discussion that would certainly invite them to further reflection.

Finally, the author addressed the Principle of Supervision. Jesus' disciple-making strategy did not end with demonstrating and then delegating responsibilities to his disciples. Using gospel references, the author demonstrated to the participants how Jesus used very meaningful moments to supervise his disciples and to provide them with feedback on their attitudes and character while affirming their strengths and self-worth. Jesus often had to correct his disciples for their lack of understanding and spiritual discernment, their impatience and intolerance, and their impulsivity and exclusiveness. The author challenged the participants vis-à-vis their own positions in life and ministry by asking them if they have someone they are

accountable to and if there is anyone in their own lives who is able to speak wisdom, keep them straight about spiritual disciplines, correct and encourage them. Lastly, the author underlined the critical importance of accountability in disciple-making and spiritual growth by pointing out several benefits from it including the fact that accountability contributes to a higher level of commitment to God, to others, and to God's kingdom work.

Session 4: The Principles of Reproduction and Impartation

The fourth session took place on October 7, 2023. The flow of this last session followed the previous ones. A team member opened with prayer and the author engaged the participants in a summary review of the material covered in the previous sessions. Then the author took a few minutes to share about his personal testimony of learning about the Great Commission and the calling he received from the Lord to commit the rest of his life to disciple-making. Next, the author presented on the Principle of Reproduction and the fact that Jesus anticipated fruitfulness from his disciples. The initial discussion focused on 2 Timothy 2:2 and the charge of the apostle Paul to Timothy to pass on everything he had learned from him to other people who would be able to teach others in turn, thus revealing a process stretching over four generations. Another essential reference was used from John 15 and Jesus' metaphor of the vinedresser, the vine and the branches with a stress on the fruit as the evaluation of a person and the measurement of what a ministry truly accomplishes. Then, the author looked into reproduction in disciple-making as the divine mechanism and only plan for the completion of the kingdom of God. What followed was a detailed discussion on the nature of God's kingdom, the "already but not yet" character of God's kingdom rule, the biblical terminology related to God's kingdom, and the human role and responsibility in the expansion of God's kingdom.

Further, the author affirmed one of the pillars of the Protestant Reformation, namely the priesthood of all believers, which if put into practice would allow all believers to actively serve and be a part of the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The author urged the participants to maintain a stance of humility vis-à-vis the task of disciple-making and multiplication and beware of allowing sheer numbers to become the driving force and main focus in their disciple-making efforts. One of the main proofs that the plan of Jesus for world conquest through disciple-making works is found in the account of the book of Acts revealing the ministry and success of the church in its early stages of development. With all the challenges that the contemporary church is facing, the author emphasized the need for the church to get back to the example of Jesus and to focus on the development of people as God's method for evangelism.

At the beginning of the second unit for this session the author proceeded by reviewing with the participants all the requirements for finishing the course successfully and for receiving a certificate of completion. He then distributed pieces of paper on which each participant had to state the number of pages they had read from the required reading for the course. He also gave the participants the options of writing down the assigned passages for Scripture memorization or reciting them aloud for the whole class. The author found it surprising that even those of the participants who chose to write down the memorization verses, still wanted to stand up and recite them for the whole class. These two options were given in order to allow the participants to choose which one worked better with regards to their literacy level. During the week before the final session and on the day of this last gathering, the participants submitted either electronically or on paper the last assignment for the course – a farewell letter to a potential disciple whom they had trained and who would be going away for a long time.

This session finally dealt with the Principle of Impartation, which underlines the fact that Jesus gives the Holy Spirit to his followers allowing them and empowering them to fulfill the Great Commission and any ministry for that matter. The author presented an overview of the presence and role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, working primarily through individuals like kings, prophets, and priests to accomplish particular callings and tasks. He made a point that in the Old Testament no individual is described as a temple of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit was not dwelling in anyone. Then the author discussed the New Testament picture of Christ-followers individually and the fellowship of believers corporately being a temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the believer. The author emphasized strongly the need for embracing an approach to disciple-making which acknowledges that the fulfillment of the Great Commission is ultimately God's work through Christ-followers that can be done only in the power of the Spirit. The Principle of Impartation would have been appropriately taught at any point of a disciple-making training but the author decided that the Principle of Incarnation and the Principle of Impartation being taught at the beginning and the end of the course create a wonderful *inclusio* that makes a very powerful statement about the nature of God's work and the fundamental attitude a Christ-follower should adopt in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

After the conclusion of the teaching session, the participants were given the opportunity to fill out and turn in the second survey for the course (Appendix E). After this, the author and the team briefly reviewed each participant's record for the course in terms of attendance and requirements met for graduation and proceeded to distribute the certificates of completion of the course. The session concluded with prayer by a designated team member and individual and group pictures.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

The author's expectation for this thesis-project was three-fold. First, he hoped that, through this project, his hypothesis would be positively confirmed and that the cause of the Great Commission would be advanced among Gypsy church leaders through acquired knowledge and understanding. This would be a tremendous gain for the kingdom of God because these leaders were in the position of casting a vision for discipleship and disciple-making in their local faith communities. In the long run, such a vision could become the foundation for an intentional disciple-making movement in the larger Gypsy community in Bulgaria and beyond.

Second, at the onset of this project, the author could not see any other viable method to help Gypsy pastors and church leaders to embrace the Great Commission than to lay the foundation for them and to help them make their first steps into intentional disciple-making. In this regard, the author's high expectation was that, through this project, a given number of participants would respond positively to the training and personal relationship built during the training, so that by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, they would actually initiate disciple-making efforts in their local faith communities. Certainly, this would be the most valuable outcome – to see disciples of Jesus being trained.

Third, the author was convinced that his own exploration through this project would provide him with invaluable feedback and future direction in his own mission work, which would also inform further an approach to disciple-making training and ministry, and theological training in general, among Gypsy church leaders in Bulgaria. As a result of the disciple-making training which was part of this thesis-project, the author and his team were able to gather

important observations, draw critical conclusions, and analyze the results from the project based on the measurements provided by the two course surveys that the participants took during the disciple-making course. The author has looked into the outcomes in a two-fold way. First, an analysis of the results from the preparation, the logistics, and the execution of the project itself, which provide excellent learning points and to which is dedicated the first part of this chapter. Second, the results from the formal disciple-making training as they relate to its content and its impact on the course participants, and especially their readiness to translate into practice the newly acquired knowledge on the Great Commission and its calling to the church today.

Registration Process and Outcome

The registration for a formal course designed primarily for Gypsy pastors presented a number of challenges. For a pilot project like this one, sufficient strategizing and planning were key elements to success. The tactic of reaching selected pastors and church leaders and extending the invitation to the course to others through them was meaningful and it proved to be overall successful. It allowed the team to gain more credibility among church leaders who did not know personally the author and his team. The endorsement of a Gypsy leader can be of critical importance for reaching out to other Gypsy church leaders and this author advises that this approach be used as much as possible in formal biblical and theological ministry training in the Gypsy community.

The timeframe for the course registration was well chosen and provided an adequate amount of time for prospective course participants to get acquainted with the invitation and to reserve the dates for the course on their calendars. What the author and his team found to be of crucial importance was the invitation follow-up. On the one hand, it facilitated the production of

the course materials for the actual number of participants intending to join the group after the registration. On the other hand, it also helped the Gypsy church leaders to remember that they had signed up for the course and thus to avoid taking other engagements for the course dates. As discussed in chapter 1, time has a different value in the Gypsy community and planning ahead presents a serious challenge bordering the impossible. So, the personal follow-up with registered participants ensured their presence on the first day of class meeting. This observation was well supported by the number of registered participants (36) and the number of participants (33) who showed up for the first course session.[1] The personal follow-up communication clearly revealed that a significant number of registered participants had forgotten about the beginning of the course and would have missed the course altogether, had not a team member reached out to them personally with a reminder.

Another finding is worth discussing, namely the role and potential of online registration. For this thesis-project, the online registration was strongly promoted in order to test its efficacy and the level to which it could facilitate or hinder the registration process. The outcome was expected to determine its functionality and applicability in future ministry training among Gypsy church leaders and the Gypsy community as a whole. As a result of the experience gained from this thesis-project, the author and his team consider the online registration to be a very successful approach which achieves a few goals. It facilitates the work of the organizing team and allows for easier information gathering, sorting, and storing with fewer errors. It also allows prospective participants to register easily, without having to waste time to meet with a team member in order to submit a registration form. For this thesis-project, the overwhelming majority of the registered participants managed to register online without any difficulty. Out of the total of 36 registered participants, only 3 participants requested help over the phone and were registered by a team

[1] These numbers will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section in this chapter.

member. The author believes that this provides good insight into the future of digital registration among Gypsy church leaders and the general Gypsy community.

Participants, Attendance, and Participant Attrition

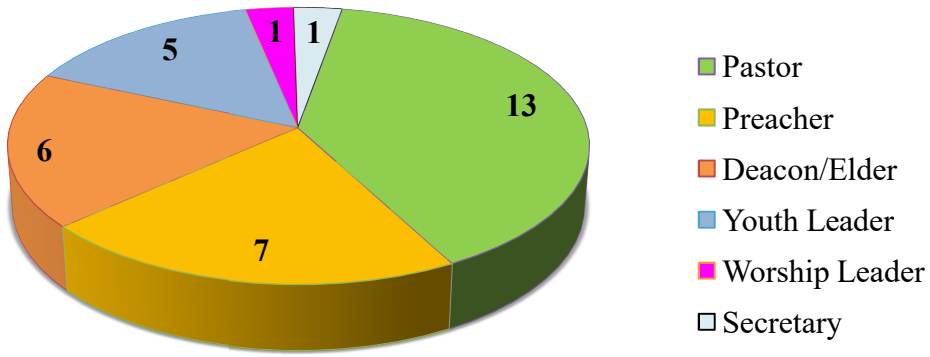
The inherent beauty of the Great Commission is in its inclusiveness. It is a calling to the whole Church for the whole world. It does not segregate on any basis and it invites the local church in its diversity to make disciples of Jesus who in turn make disciples. One of the author's concerns about this thesis-project was whether there would be a way to invite women to participate along with male participants. As noted earlier in chapter 1, the Gypsy faith community is exclusively male-driven and ministry and leadership roles are usually assigned to men. Women are largely excluded from disciple-making and ministry outside of their formal attendance at church worship gatherings. Their personal and spiritual growth does not appear to be of any concern to Gypsy church leadership. This author has reflected a lot on the question of how it would be possible and gender-appropriate for Gypsy women to be discipled and taught how to disciple others. The obvious answer would have been to train Gypsy women who train women in turn.

For the disciple-making course, only three women registered – all three being the wives of church leaders. Two of them participated online along with their husbands and one of them participated with her husband in person but neither she nor her husband completed the course. So out of 36 registered participants, to the author's disappointment, only three were women and only two finished the course successfully. These results left the author with the question if there would be a better and more successful way to extend the invitation to church women to participate in formal disciple-making training in the future. The author suggests that working

more closely with prospective male participants and casting a vision among them for disciple-making in their churches that reaches beyond men to include a large portion of their congregations could be conducive to increased female participation. Involving women in gender-appropriate ministry and disciple-making is certainly a key to remedy a major handicap in the growth and outreach of the local Gypsy church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission among men and women alike.

The disciple-making course was clearly addressed to church leaders and the author and his team recruited participants who served in any leadership capacity in their local church. The following chart shows the breakdown of the numbers based on the 33 initial participants' answers on the online registration form.

Figure 1. Course Participants – Church Roles



As noted earlier, the disciple-making course was initially planned only for in-person participation. This decision was largely driven by the incarnational nature of disciple-making

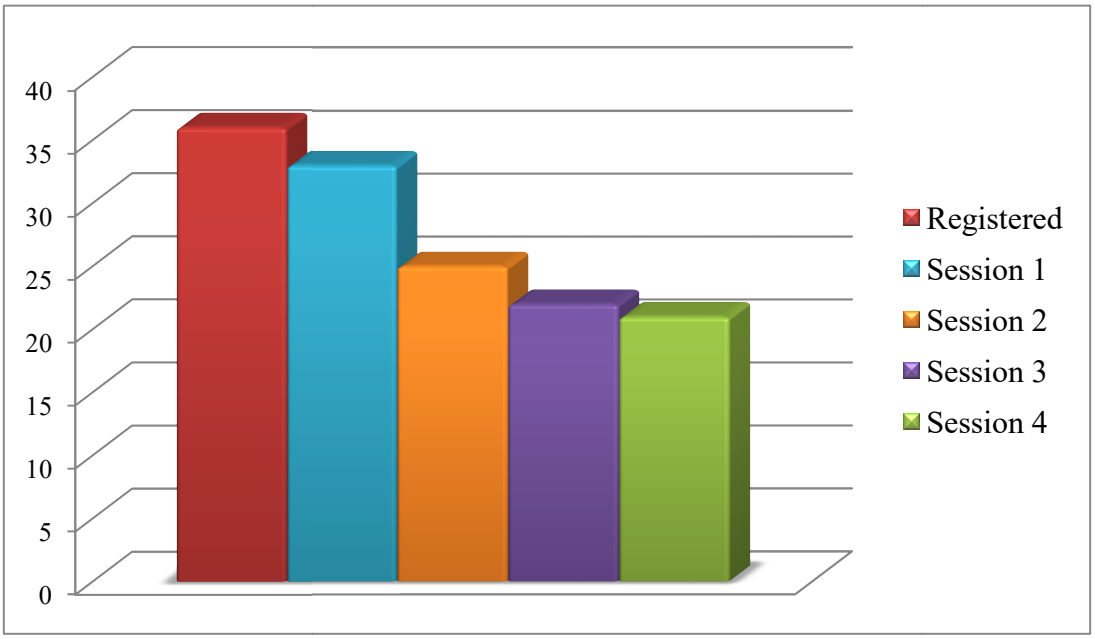
that the author and his team wanted to practice and demonstrate to all participants. However, the online invitations published on social platforms drew the attention of prospective participants who were far from the general area of the course location. The inquiries for online participation invited the author and his team to accept the challenge and to extend to such participants the opportunity to join the course online. Of all registered participants (36), 5 connected online for all the course sessions and all 5 (3 men and 2 women) completed the course successfully. The author believes that the online option for disciple-making training (and theological training in general) of Gypsy church leaders is neither to be neglected nor to be underestimated. It may in fact be a key to reaching and training the leadership of a widespread Bulgarian Gypsy diaspora in Europe (Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, etc.), especially if it is combined with personal visits and follow-up with trained course participants.

This thesis-project was initially planned to gather a group of 10-15 Gypsy church leaders for formal disciple-making training. The author and his team extended the invitation to a larger group of prospective participants and allowed for a larger group to register and participate. In retrospect, this decision turned out to be particularly meaningful, judging from the participation rates and outcome. A larger initial group that shrunk to a smaller one over the course of the four class meetings allowed for a good core group to remain until the completion of the course and to represent a meaningful sample for testing of the thesis-project hypothesis. It also justified all the work of preparation and execution of the project that the author and his team delivered.

As indicated earlier, 36 participants registered for the disciple-making course. However, the thesis-project began with 33 participants. Of the three missing participants, one contacted the author and indicated that he was sick and would not be able to attend while the other two did not show up for unknown reasons. Session 2 was attended by 25 participants, Session 3 by 22, and

the final Session 4 was attended by 21 participants who also received their certificates of completion.

Figure 2. Number of Participants Across Course Sessions



As the graphics indicate, the participant attrition was progressive with the biggest decrease in numbers following the first session of the course. The author and his team were not able to identify the reasons why some 8 participants suddenly dropped from the course. One possible explanation for at least five of them could be that since they came from the same village and used the same transportation together, it may be that one or two of them did not identify well with the subject of the course or the requirements for completion and influenced the rest of them to drop the course altogether. What was surprising was that even the course fee paid before the first session did not motivate these participants to pursue the completion of the course. The author was somewhat disappointed that from the 36 registered and 33 in attendance for the first

session, only 21 completed the whole course successfully. At the same time, the fact that 21 participants completed the course could be interpreted as a good result and definite success especially in light of the challenge that the length of the course presented for Gypsy church leaders. Participant attrition after the second and third session was partially due to some participants not being able to take more and more Saturdays off from their jobs, as some of them shared about with the author. This brings up the important issue of course planning and length.

The length of the course stretching over 4 weeks was both a compromise and a strategic teaching decision. One the one hand, the author was convinced that smaller units of teaching presented in a series of multiple sessions would be definitely more logical and effective from the standpoint of the teaching-learning process. On the other hand, based on his prior ministry experience of work among Gypsy leadership, the author was well-aware that stretching the course over more than a few weeks would basically pre-determine a negative outcome in terms of commitment to participation and would doom participants to failure. Based on the observed numbers of participant attrition, the author deems the determination to limit the course to only four class meetings over four weeks as good. All this being said, the author advises that other course formats could be explored and tested in the future. One such possibility, that the author discussed with his team as a post-course debriefing, could be in the form of a retreat at a location within reasonable distance from the area. Such a retreat could span over two days during which the author would present the same teaching material. While such a format would require more financial involvement on the part of the organizers and of the participants, it would also have two major benefits, which can alleviate some of the difficulties related to participant attrition. First, it would minimize the need for long-term commitment and it would only require commitment to participate in a single block of time. Second, when participants are away from the city and the

surrounding area, this would practically eliminate the chance for dropping the course or not attending the sessions. Another benefit of such a format is that it could foster the development of closer relationships between participants and the teaching team. Of course, such a format will probably slightly compromise the teaching-learning process and will present the participants with the challenge of absorbing larger amounts of information over a shorter time period. Still, the author and his team remained motivated to explore the possibility of using such a format in the future.

The Course Fee

From the very beginning of the thesis-project planning, the question of a course fee required a wise decision. As discussed in the previous chapter, the author went from planning to offer the course free of any charge to deciding to introduce a small, rather symbolic course participation fee. The outcome from this decision could be considered as positive. From all registered participants, only one reached out to the organizing team with a request for a scholarship, which the author and his team honored and provided. The author learned an important lesson for any disciple-making or other theological training among Gypsy church leaders in the future, namely that the course fee did not seem to prevent any prospective participant from registering and participating in the course. Obviously, the Gypsy participants were neither pushed away by the fact that there was a fee associated with the course, nor were they unable to assume the cost for it. In light of this, the author was able to make two conclusions. First, the course fee could be slightly higher, being more of a real fee instead of a symbolic one, which would allow the organizing team to actually cover more fully the expenses associated with the organization of the course. This would also filter prospective participants

who truly want and intend to participate and would add more value to the training itself. Second, from a practical and strategic standpoint, the organizing team should find a way to have participants pay the fee upfront in order to facilitate the preparation of course materials according to the real number of participants and to avoid participants dropping the course before it even started.

Limitations

The interpersonal relationship, which provides the foundation for discipleship and disciple-making, can only be established, developed, and nurtured over time. So, discipleship and disciple-making are time-dependent. Time provides the meaningful context for an example to be demonstrated in real-life situations, which is a more powerful teaching tool than mere teaching words. Jesus' was intentional in his choice of his training methods which, to use again Jim Putman's words, "were relational in nature… because He understood that more is 'caught' than 'taught' and this is how Jesus "invested His life in the Twelve."[2] The author of this thesis-project was well aware of the major limitation a disciple-making course presented, namely the contrast between a good teaching material and the inability to demonstrate it in real-life and to offer a practical example of the very principles taught in the course. The author found at least a partial remedy to this dilemma by offering to the Gypsy course participants personal follow-up in order to guide and encourage them further on their disciple-making journey. The course was completed at the beginning of October, 2023 which was right before getting into the church preparations for and busyness around Christmas. So, only four participants were able to take advantage of in-person follow-up meetings by the completion of this work. In those meetings, the author discussed practical steps towards initiating disciple-making efforts and shared about

[2] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010), 49.

different methods he himself has used in his own experience of training disciples. The author was encouraged by the interpersonal and ministry bridges that were built during the course and he is convinced that these bridges would serve as the foundation for further disciple-making and training relationships.

Results From Surveys

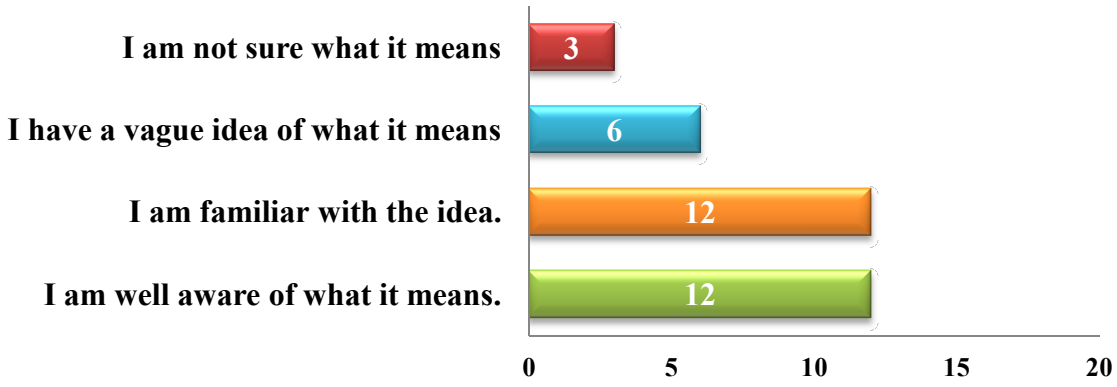
The two surveys, which the participants took as part of the course, were undoubtedly one of the main sources of information on the effectiveness of the project and a way to find out to what degree the author's hypothesis for this thesis-project was confirmed. As already outlined in the previous chapter, the aim of the first survey (Appendix C) was to explore the participants' knowledge and understanding of the Great Commission as well as their experience of being discipled and of making disciples of Jesus prior to the disciple-making course. The second survey's (Appendix E) goal was to evaluate the degree to which the course participants gained knowledge and better understanding of the Great Commission as well as their enthusiasm for and readiness to commit to engaging people in disciple-making relationships, following the course.

The author's observation was that the participants took to heart both surveys and were excited by the opportunity to answer the questions. The design of the survey questions appeared to facilitate well the filling out of the survey forms. The author and his team did not observe any difficulty and none of the participants requested help while taking the surveys. All 33 initial participants filled out Survey 1 and all 21 final participants filled out Survey 2. For the sake of this chapter, the results are reported and analyzed in two ways - taking into account the total of responses from all initial participants, and alternatively, the responses from the 21 participants who filled out both surveys and whose answers could be also tracked both individually according

to their survey number and as a group, based on the two surveys they took. The first way provides a picture from a larger sample of Gypsy church leaders about their basic knowledge and experience vis-à-vis the Great Commission. It could serve as a collective image of the trends in disciple-making within the local area (and probably in Gypsy communities in the whole country) considering the fact that they represented a total of seventeen churches from nine different locations. The second way of analysis provides data and insight on the effectiveness of the training for those participants who faithfully completed the course with all its requirements. What follows are the two surveys with the generated answers, including the summarized results from the initial 33 participants and the ones from the 21 course graduates.[3]

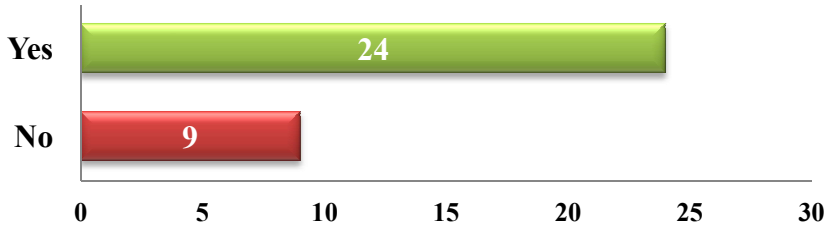
<u>Survey 1</u> (All 33 initial participants) – September 16, 2023

1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"…**

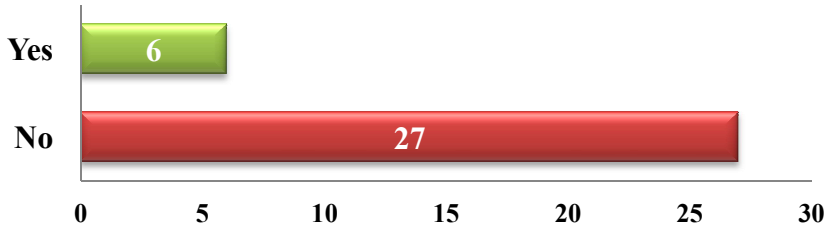


[3] As it will be indicated later in this chapter, a comparative summary of the results from Survey 1 taken by the initial 33 participants and by the 21 participants who completed the course with all its requirements could be found in Appendix F.

2. **Have you ever been discipled?**

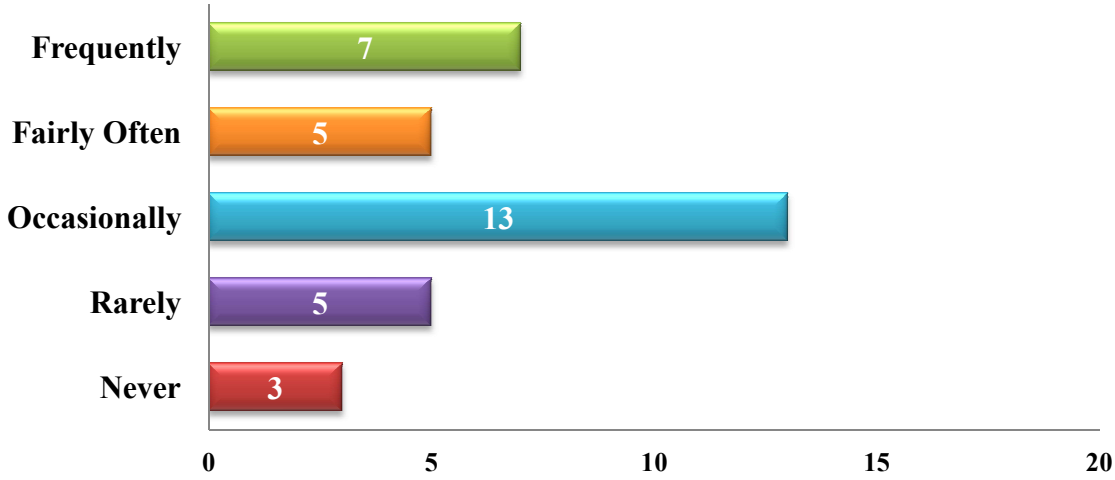


3. **Have you ever participated in any formal training or course on disciple-making?**

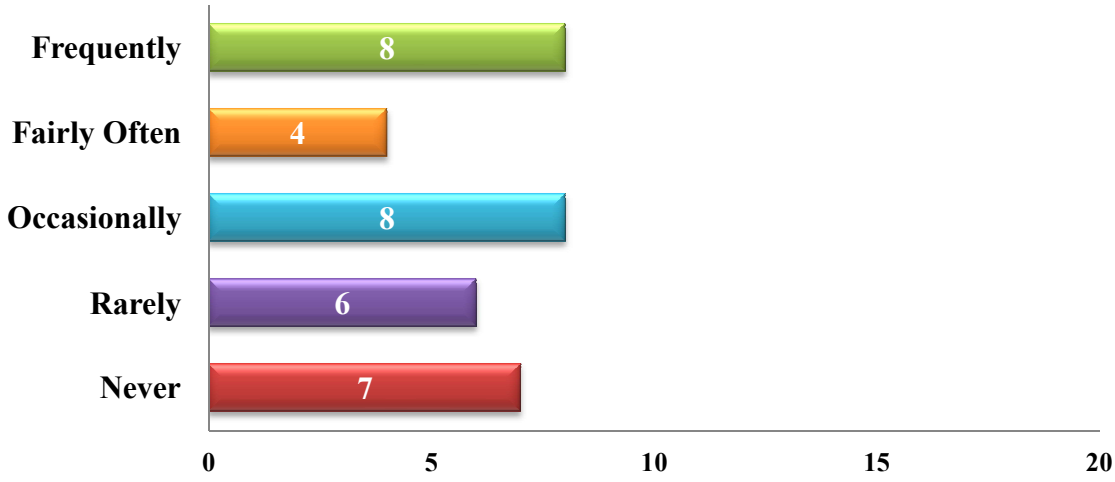


If yes, when and what kind of training? – The 6 participants who have answered "Yes" to the main question have also answered the clarifying question but all 6 answers are vague (e.g., "various," "how to study the Word") and do not provide any clear information.

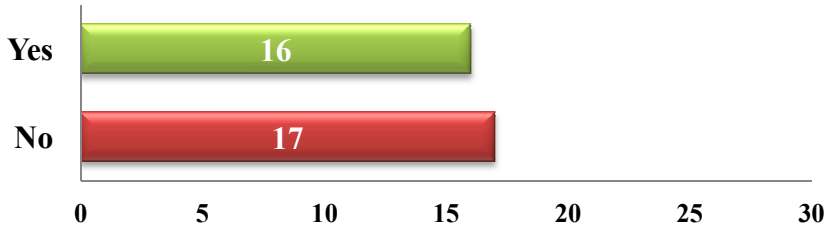
4. **Have you preached or taught on what it means *to be* a disciple of Jesus?**



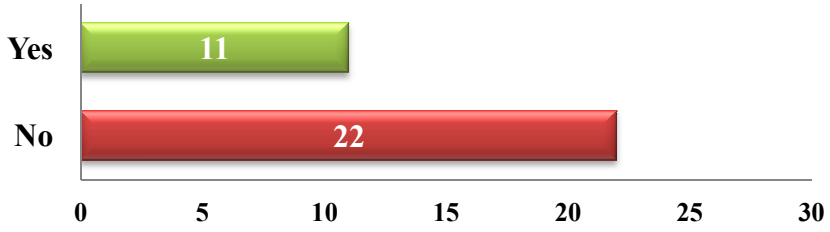
5. **Have you preached or taught on *making disciples* of Jesus?**



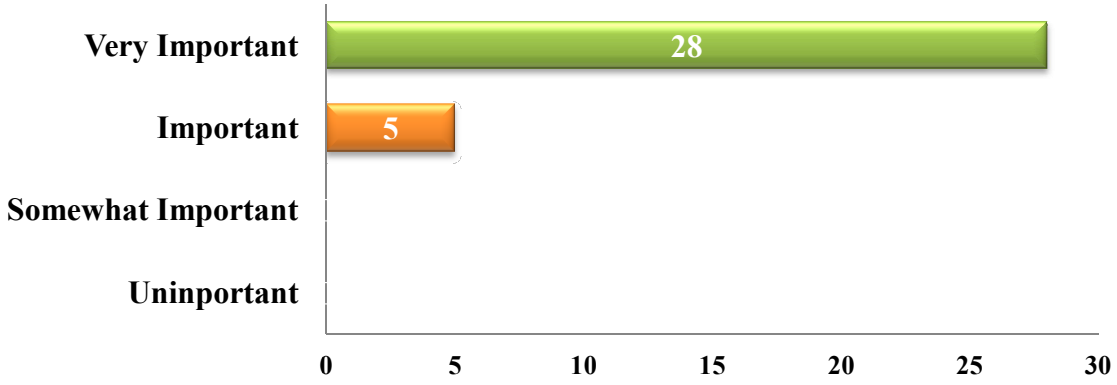
6. **Have you been in disciple-making relationships with people you have trained in the past?**



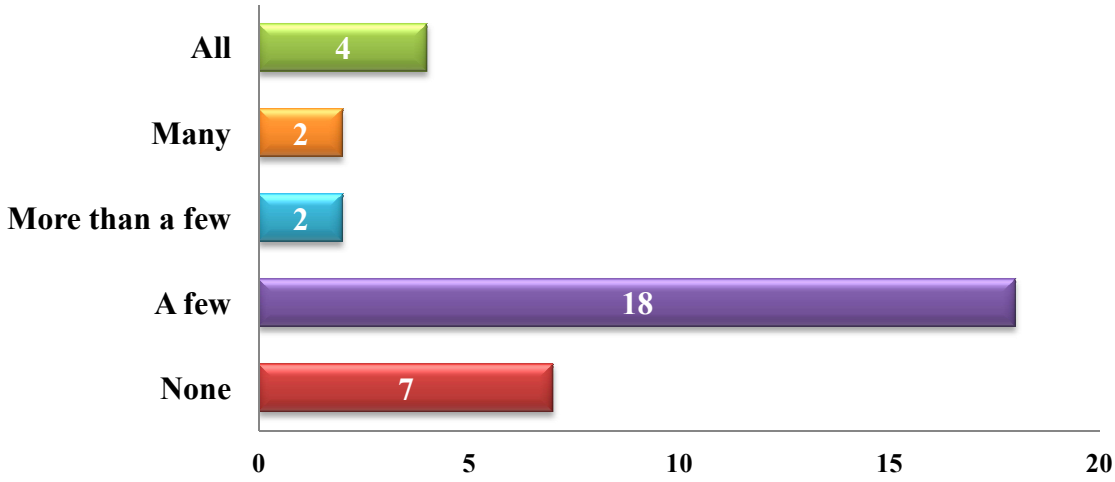
7. **Are you in a disciple-making relationship with someone you are currently training?**



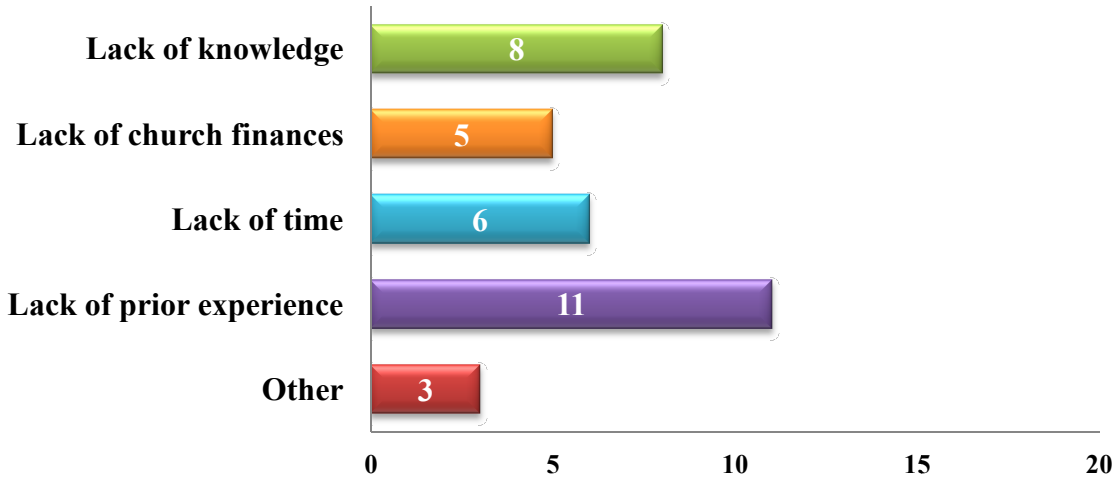
8. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel?**



9. **Of the churches in your area, how many are you aware of that are involved in making disciples of Jesus?**



10. **If you ever wanted to train disciples but you did not, what prevented you from doing it?**



From the answers of the starter group to Survey 1, it becomes clear that among them there is a very high appreciation for the Great Commission and its importance to the church and to the proclamation of the gospel (Question 8). All 33 participants have deemed the Great

Commission as important (5) or very important (28). These results seem to be in line with the level of awareness the participants have expressed with regards to the notion of "disciple-making" – 24 out of 33 have claimed that they are familiar with (12) or well aware (12) of what it means (Question 1). In addition, 24 of them have indicated that they have been discipled (Question 2). The author was somewhat perplexed by these high numbers and wondered if some of the participants may have responded in ways that would conceal their lack of knowledge and that would be more socially acceptable. He would suggest that a similar survey could include more clarifying sub-questions, that would help flesh out more specifically each participant's answer to the main question. In this case, questions like "How have you been discipled?" "Who has discipled you?" may bring to the surface more about what the participant considers as "being discipled" and if their experience actually reflects a biblical disciple-making process and relationship. Things be as they may, for this survey, the author's goal was to obtain information based on the participants' perceptions, especially based on their immediate responses. His objective was to also present a survey that is as simple as possible and easy to work with, which would allow the participants to engage and take the survey. The author's conclusion is that slightly more involving questions in future surveys would not be out of place. As general as these survey questions were, the participants' responses revealed that, based on their own perceptions, a good number of them had some kind of experience of being discipled.

The participants' own prior engagement in ministry involving discipleship and disciple-making as part of their preaching and teaching displayed a rather low level – 21 out of 33 have preached or taught on what it means to be a disciple and making disciples of Jesus occasionally, rarely or never. These last results suggest that a significant portion (close to 2/3) of the participants, as church leaders, have a rather low pulpit intentionality vis-à-vis the Great

Commission. What was interesting was the participants' estimation of the general disciple-making activity of local churches in their area – 25 of 33 have responded that only a few (18) or no (7) churches in their area are involved in disciple-making. These responses, based on the knowledge and observations of these participants, are somewhat alarming as they reveal a lot about the current state of disciple-making in local churches in a whole area of Bulgaria. These results also correspond well with the author's observations in his own mission work and exploration of the state of affairs of disciple-making on a local and a national level in Bulgaria.

The received feedback from the participants is an indicator of how little the local faith communities are involved in fulfilling the most critical command of Jesus to his church and of a tendency in local churches to ignore the calling of the Great Commission. As noted earlier in this thesis-project, Robert E. Coleman accurately diagnoses the situation and this weakness of the contemporary church and his poignant words seem to speak directly to Gypsy churches in the south-eastern part of Bulgaria. Coleman says that "Jesus' plan has not been disavowed; it has just been ignored."[4] This in itself underlines the need for more and more ministry among Gypsy church leaders, that would help increase their awareness of Jesus' command to make disciples and would encourage them to start fulfilling the Great Commission in their local faith communities.

The initial participants were split in half as to their own disciple-making past history (Question 6). As the graph shows, 16 out of 33 have claimed that they have been in disciple-making relationships with people they have trained while the rest (17) have not been in such relationships. These results could be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, half of the participants have responded positively which means that they consider themselves as fulfilling (at least in the past) the Great Commission, which is certainly encouraging. On the other hand,

[4] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008), 96.

one could look at the other half of pastors and church leaders who have no history whatsoever of making disciples and their percentage is rather significant. There is no doubt that church leaders play an essential role in setting the tone for ministry and mission in the local church and what they promote and emphasize as relevant reflects directly on their congregations. It could be speculated that if these pastors and church leaders have not trained anyone in discipleship in their churches, then most probably none of their church members have been involved in personal discipleship and in disciple-making. In terms of numbers, this would mean that hundreds of believers have not had the opportunity to be trained in discipleship and to get involved in disciple-making. What is more, an even larger number of course participants (22 out of 33) have stated that they are currently not training anyone in discipleship (Question 7). Apparently, even if 24 out of 33 have been discipled (Question 2), their personal discipleship and prior training is currently not reproducing and the process of disciple-making is not being perpetuated. In the author's evaluation, these numbers were not unexpected and they reflect a sad and wide-range church reality. Again, this author believes that these results reveal the need for extensive and far-reaching disciple-making training of Gypsy pastors and church leaders. Far from being discouraging, they also point to the opportunity for establishing a disciple-making training program that would have the potential to help lead a transformation in local Gypsy churches as to their ministry focus and commitment to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The responses to the final question of the pre-training survey speak also to the need and to the opportunity. The highest numbers of answers, a total of 19, given by the participants singled out two main reasons for not making disciples, namely "lack of knowledge" (8) and "lack of prior experience" (11). The other main answers that the participants have highlighted are lack of church finances (5) and lack of time (6). The latter are not to be ignored but the

author with his team, or anyone else for that matter, can only pray, advise, and encourage such people in their disciple-making intentions and efforts but are practically unable to help resolve the problem with lack of finances or personal time management. On the other hand, in the author's analysis, the lack of knowledge and experience underscore a path to a solution. Knowledge could be gained through disciple-making training just like this thesis-project. Further, experience could be developed and accumulated in time by demonstration, application of acquired knowledge, and follow-up. All of this leads to a final point from the pre-training survey.

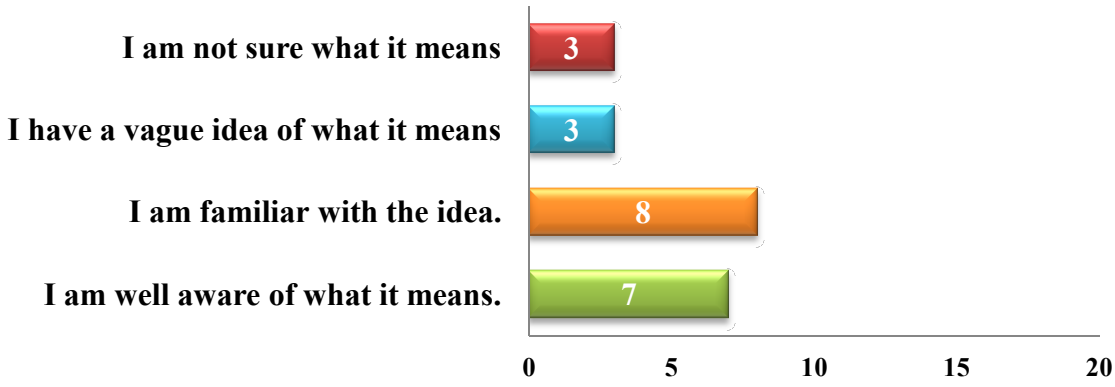
From the inception of this thesis-project, the author suspected that a solid biblical disciple-making training had not been offered to church leaders not only in the local area but probably in the whole country of Bulgaria. While mission organizations and a number of denominations organize various seminars, conferences, and trainings, the author was not aware of any narrow-focused disciple-making course being taught, that would offer to Gypsy church leaders deeper knowledge of the Great Commission and a solid foundation for understanding their calling to make disciples of Jesus. An overwhelming number of the initial course participants (27 out of 33) indicated that they had not received *any* formal training or course on disciple-making (Question 3). This confirmed to a large degree the author's observations.

Only 6 participants said that they have participated in disciple-making training in the past. In addition, all these 6 participants have answered the clarifying question about what specific training they have received but their answers were way too vague or inconsistent with their answer to the main question. Apparently, these church leaders have participated in various trainings prior to this thesis-project. However, the author wonders if, in the perception of these 6 participants, a course on any spiritual and Bible-related subject simply represented a good

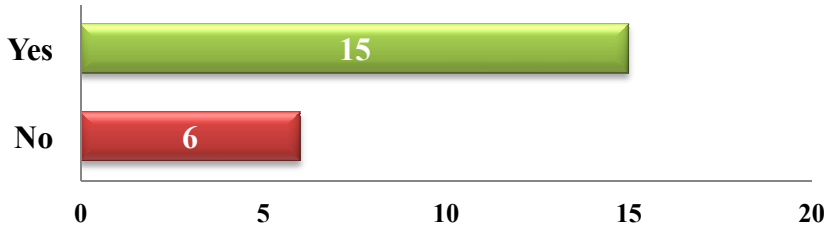
answer to the main question and that is why they have responded positively. In any case, the inevitable conclusion is that a very large percentage of the initial participants in this thesis-project had never received any formal disciple-making training and this course offered them a unique opportunity to be trained. These results reflect the bigger picture based on the responses of all 33 initial participants. What follows are the results from the pre-training survey, taken by the 21 participants who completed the course with all its requirements and a brief comparative commentary.

<u>Survey 1</u> (21 course graduates) – September 16, 2023

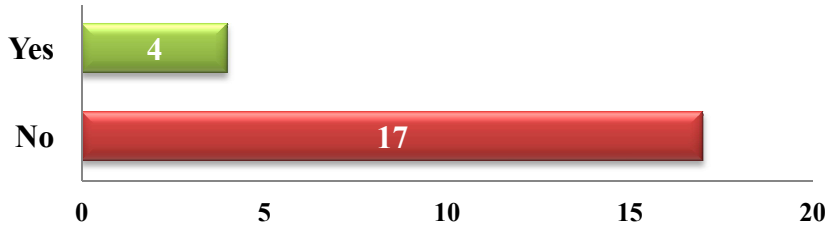
1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"…**



2. **Have you ever been discipled?**

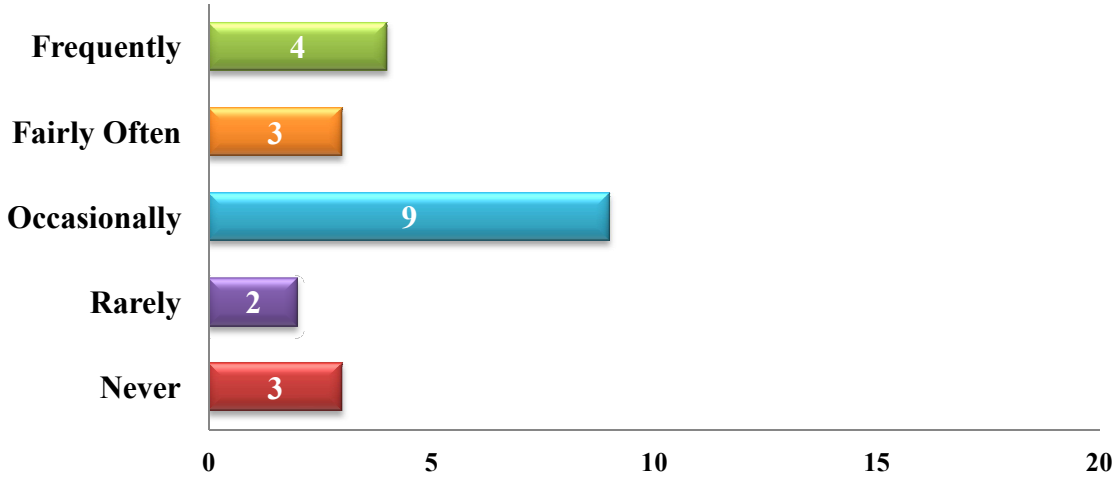


3. **Have you ever participated in any formal training or course on disciple-making?**

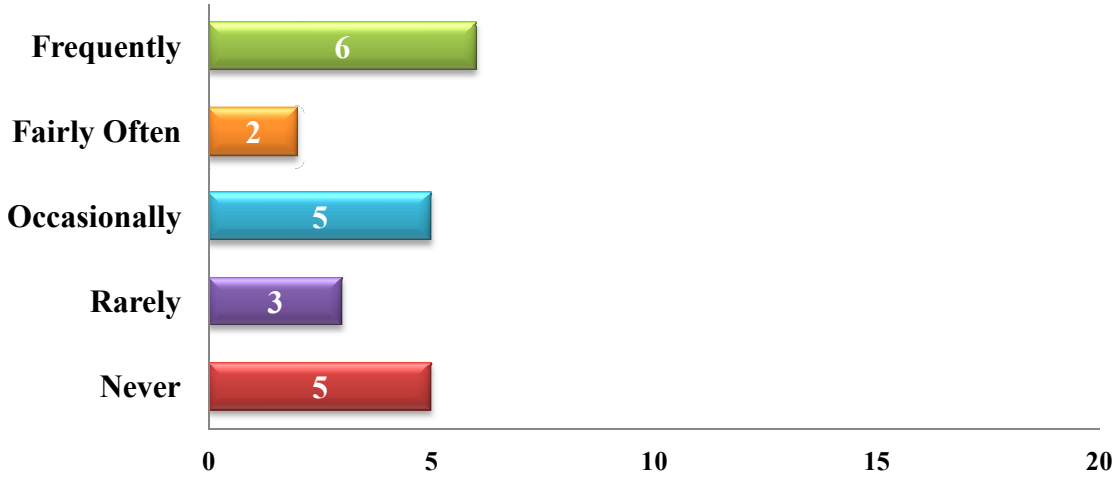


If yes, when and what kind of training? – The 4 participants who have answered "Yes" to the main question have also answered the clarifying question but all 4 answers are vague (e.g., "various," "how to study the Word") and do not provide any clear information.

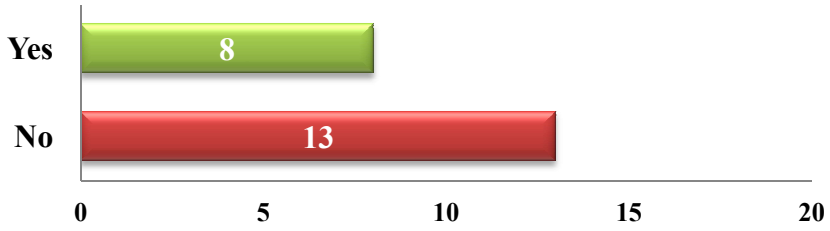
4. **Have you preached or taught on what it means *to be* a disciple of Jesus?**



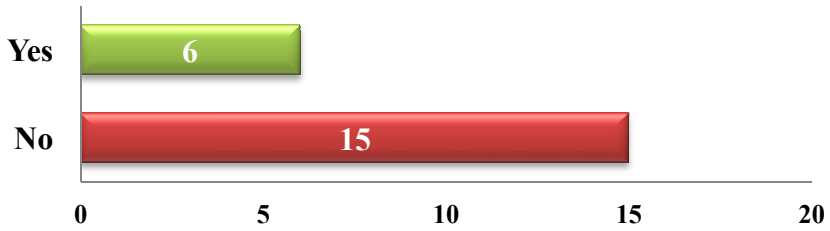
5. **Have you preached or taught on *making disciples* of Jesus?**



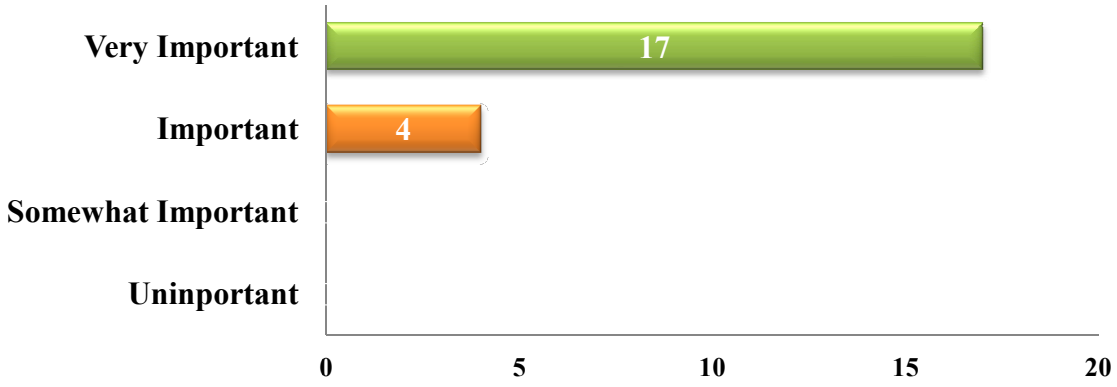
6. **Have you been in disciple-making relationships with people you have trained in the past?**



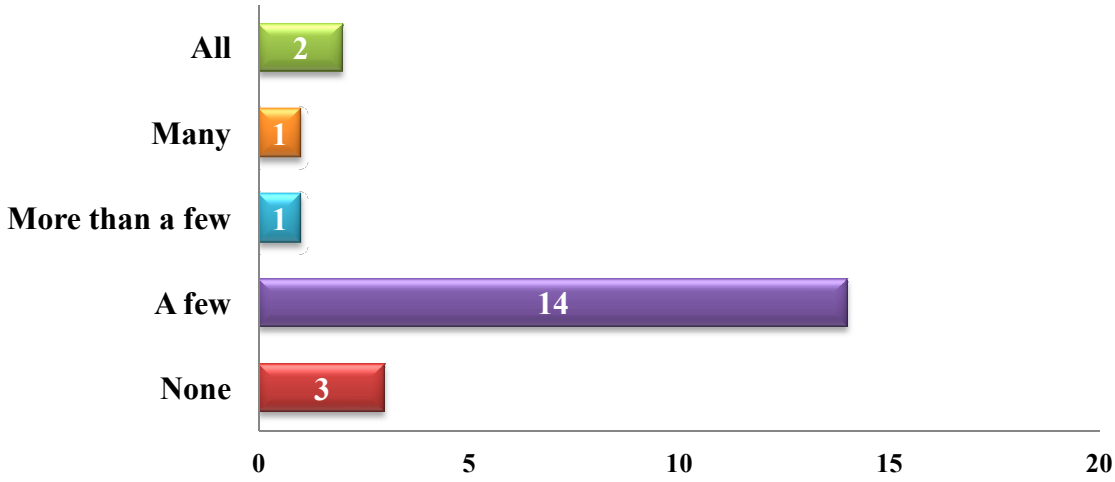
7. **Are you in a disciple-making relationship with someone you are currently training?**



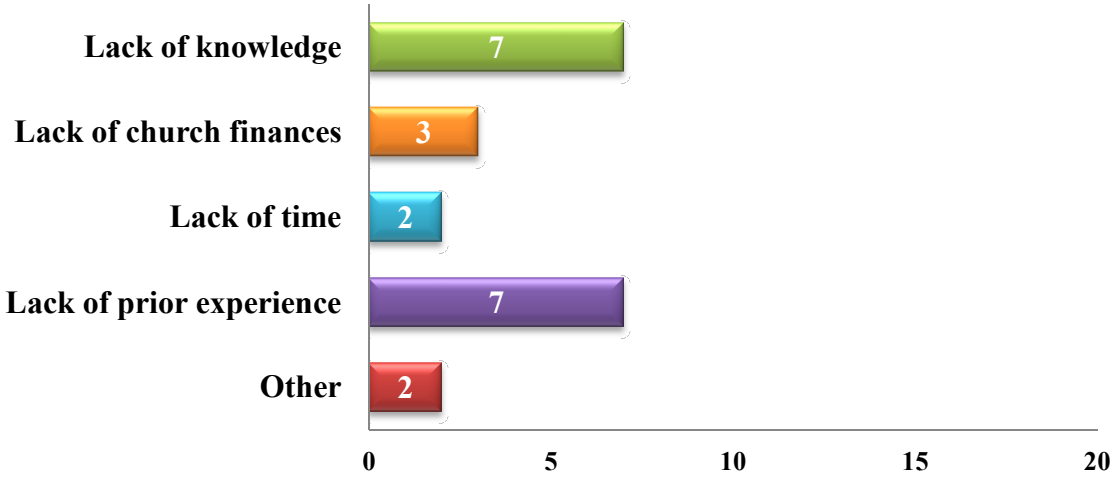
8. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel?**



9. **Of the churches in your area, how many are you aware of that are involved in making disciples of Jesus?**



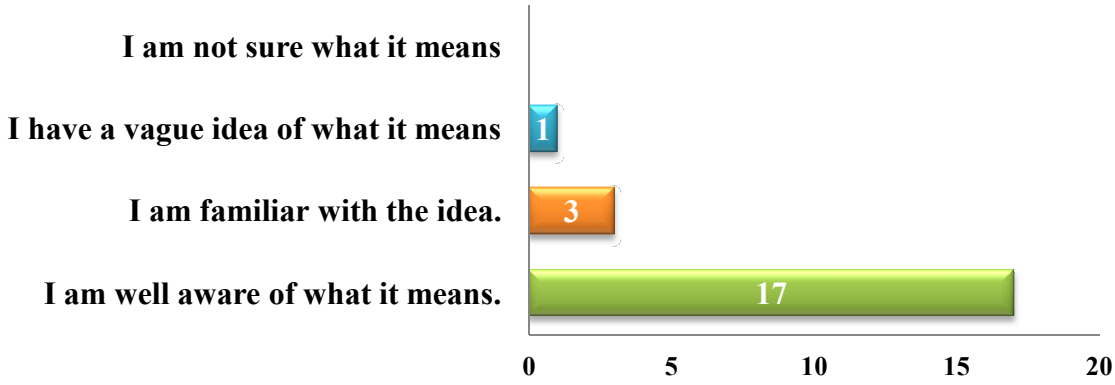
10. If you ever wanted to train disciples but you did not, what prevented you from doing it?



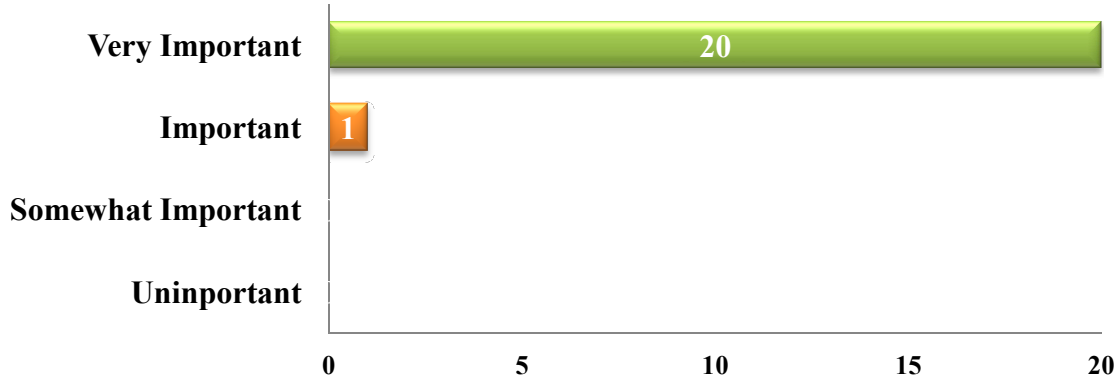
The responses from this smaller sample of course participants reflect to a large degree the same knowledge and experience vis-à-vis the Great Commission and the results are overall proportionate to the bigger sample. A comparative summary of the results could be found in Appendix F. This smaller sample of 21 participants was of even higher importance because it served as the actual point of reference and laid the foundation for a meaningful analysis of results from the post-training survey and for an evaluation of the hypothesis of this thesis-project. The numbering system that was used to identify the participants for their pre- and post-training survey forms allowed the author to isolate, from the pool of all survey forms, the pre-training survey forms of the participants who completed the course and match them with their post-training survey forms. What follows are the summary results from Survey 2.

<u>Survey 2</u> (21 course graduates) – October 7, 2023

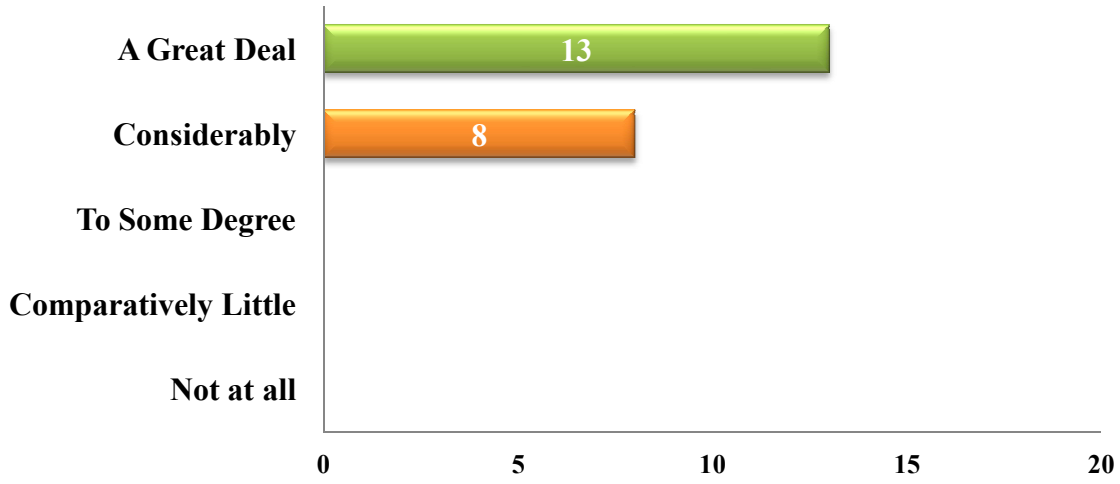
1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"…:**



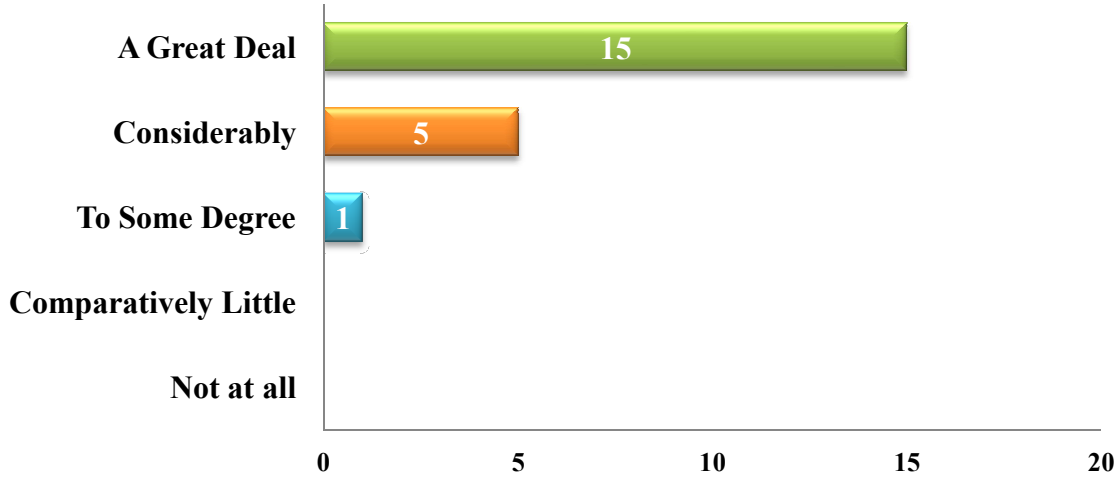
2. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel?**



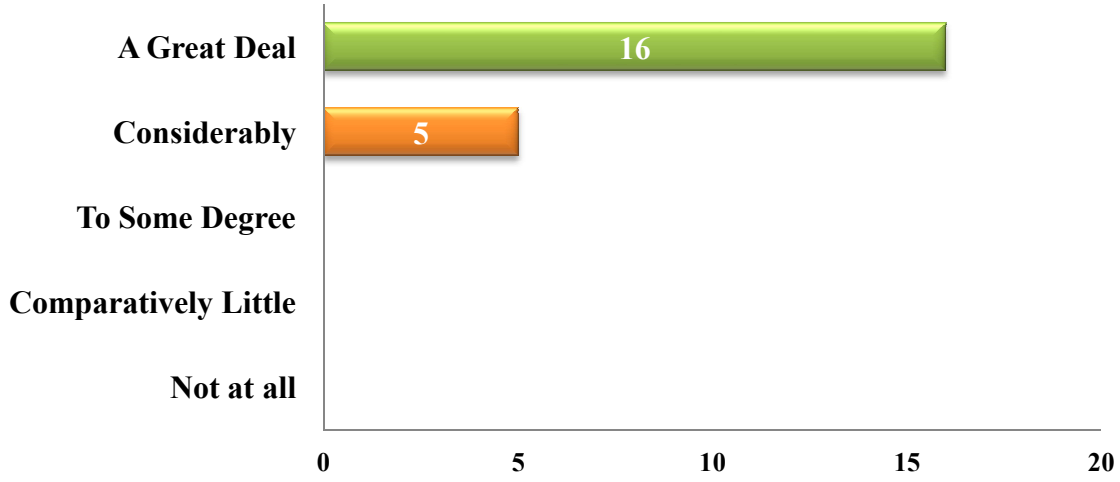
3. **This training helped me gain knowledge on the Great Commission.**



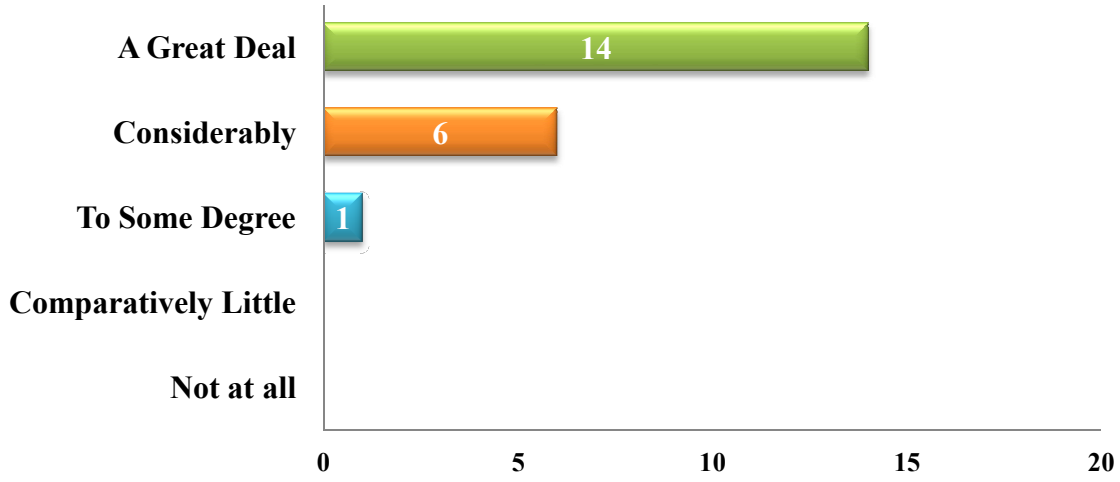
4. **This training helped me understand the call of Jesus to make disciples.**



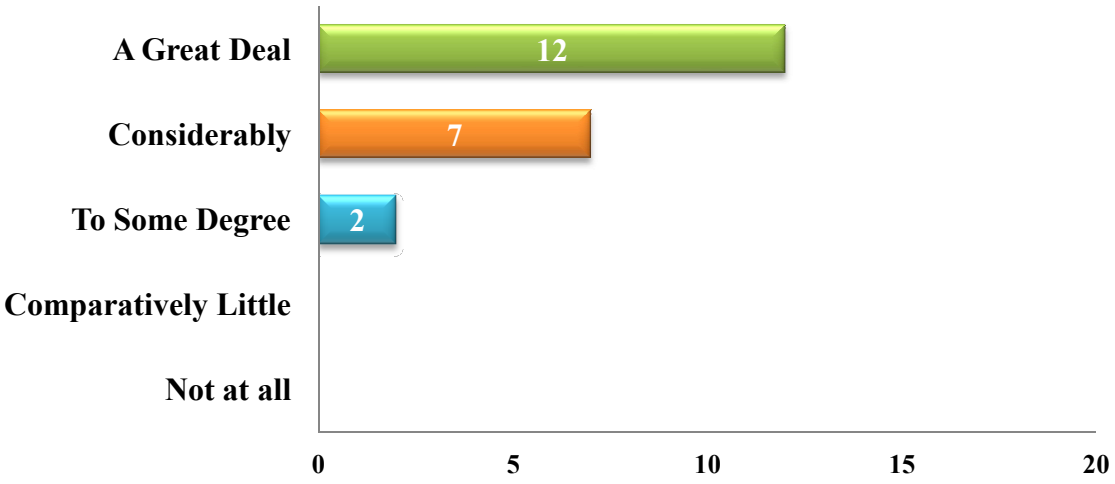
5. **This training encouraged me to start making disciples of Jesus.**



6. **This training helped me learn how to start making disciples of Jesus.**



7. **I am planning to initiate disciple-making steps with people in my church.**



8. **What was the most valuable part of this training?**

A summary of answers:

"I learned about what God wants from me"

"Everything. I realized that I have missed the most important command of Jesus and now I must start discipling others."

"We learned how to train disciples of Jesus according to his example."

"I learned how important it is to help disciples grow to full spiritual maturity."

"That we cannot make disciples without the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit."

"I understood what my calling in life is – to make disciples of Jesus."

"The most valuable was that I was trained to do what Jesus commands us to do."

"Our discussions on humility and patience in the process of training disciples."

"The principles of making disciples from the life and ministry example of Jesus."

"The most important was that we learned what we are supposed to do in the local church."

"The principles of selection and association."

9. **Was there anything missing from this training course you expected to be addressed?**

A summary of answers:

"No." or left blank – over half of all responses

"No. Everything was great."

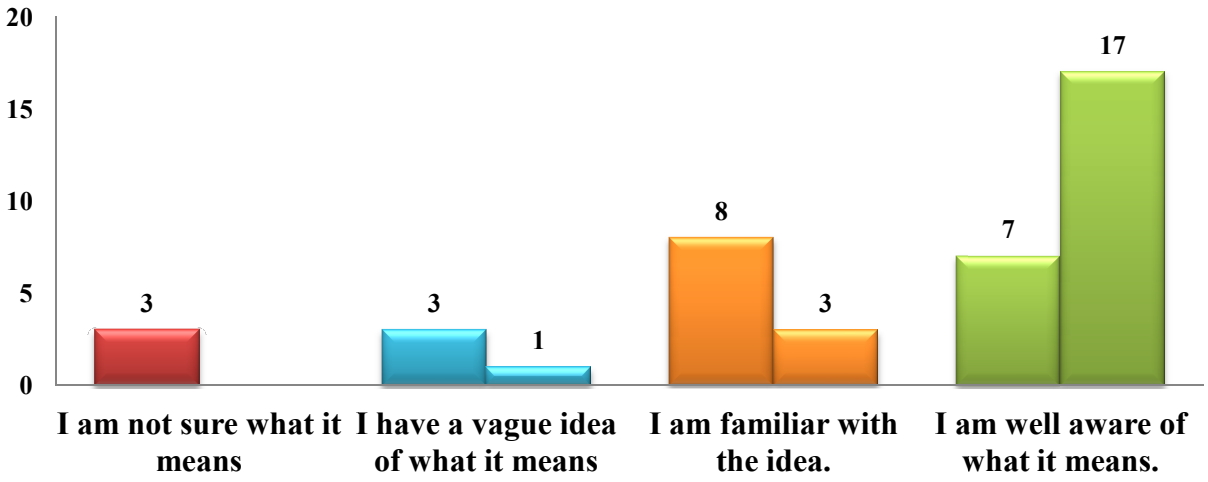
"No. I am thankful to God that we all had unique moments with God and one another, learning about the Great Commission."

"When is the next course? I cannot wait."

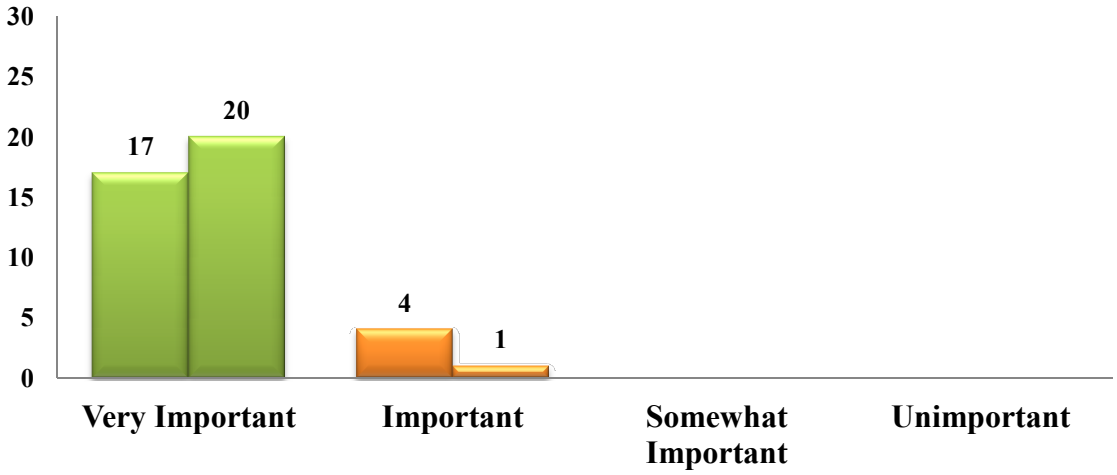
"No. Thank you for all your teaching."

The questions in Survey 2 were conceived with the aim of measuring the participants' progress in thinking and growth in knowledge of the Great Commission and its mandate to the church (Questions 1 & 2), the participants' evaluation of the effectiveness of the disciple-making course (Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 & 9), and finally to what degree the participants were intending and were ready to engage people in disciple-making relationships after the course (Question 7). The participants' answers to the first two questions showed definite progress in the clarity of their thinking about the Great Commission. An overwhelming number of participants (17 out of 21) have stated that they were well-aware of what the term "disciple-making" means (Question 1). For comparison, this number increased significantly since the beginning of the course (from 7 to 17). In addition, 3 participants have stated that they are familiar with the idea of disciple-

making. This shift in clarity of understanding could be seen well on the following comparative graphics.[5]



Similarly, progress could be observed in the results reflecting the evaluation of the participants of the importance of the Great Commission (Question 2). The participants have indicated almost unanimously (20 out of 21) that the Great Commission is very important – a number that increased from 17 to 20 between the two surveys. The following graphics helps visualize this:



[5] These comparative graphics reflect results from Survey 1 and Survey 2 on this and the following questions. The left column for each response reflects Survey 1, while the right column (with the same color) for each response reflects Survey 2.

Next, the participants have given highly positive feedback on the role that the training played for them. Their feedback on the effectiveness of the disciple-making course in terms of gaining the necessary knowledge on the Great Commission itself was highly positive (Question 3). They have all confirmed that the training helped them gain knowledge "a great deal" (13) or "considerably" (8), without any hesitation or negative responses. This author considers knowledge as foundational for action and deeper biblical understanding as key to sound application, so these results were highly satisfying and anticipated further positive feedback. Additionally, the participants have expressed great understanding not only of the Great Commission, but also of the call of Jesus to make disciples as it relates to their own life and ministry within and outside the local church (Question 4). Of all 21 participants, 20 have given the highest evaluation – "a great deal" (15) and "considerably" (5) as to how much the course has helped them understand Jesus' calling to make disciples. The author considers these results as a wonderful example of how information could lead to transformation and how the Holy Spirit can use teaching to transform hearts. The next two questions follow suit.

The participants have given a high grade on the level to which the training encouraged them to start making disciples of Jesus (Question 5). All participants were encouraged "a great deal" (16) and "considerably" (5). Encouragement could play an essential role in helping a course participant to overcome personal, spiritual, and organizational barriers that would normally prevent him/her from considering taking action based on newly acquired knowledge on and conviction about the Great Commission. What is more, the participants have displayed a high evaluation on how much the training helped them acquire the know-how of making disciples of Jesus (Question 6) – "a great deal" (14) and "considerably" (6). The author was very pleased with this feedback. The obtained results suggest that his teaching efforts and his

aspiration to conduct a disciple-making training that is as biblical and theological as it is down-to-earth and practical have paid off. Finally, the biggest question that has direct implications for practical application revealed to what degree the participants, with all the acquired knowledge and understanding, were planning to actually initiate disciple-making steps in their local community of faith (Question 7). The majority of the responses fell again on the most positive side. Of all participants, 12 said they were planning "a great deal" to start making disciples while 7 were planning "considerably." Only 2 participants intended to start disciple-making "to some degree." These responses gave the author and his team great hope that this thesis-project would result in practical involvement of Gypsy leaders in pouring their lives into the lives of disciples of Jesus.

Knowledge, calling, encouragement, know-how and readiness for action were highly evaluated by the participants who completed the training. The final two survey questions gave them the opportunity to express personal thoughts on what they found to be the most valuable part of the course and if there was anything they expected to learn that the course did not address. At the formulation of these two survey questions, the author had some reservations and doubted that the participants would take the time or that they would be able to answer these open-ended questions. To his surprise, all 21 participants indicated what they found to be the most valuable part of the course (Question 8). A summary of these responses was presented above. The participants emphasized their realization about God's calling and expectation from them to make disciples, the importance of following Jesus' example in disciple-making, and how critical the role of the Holy Spirit is in the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In addition, the author received verbal feedback as part of personal conversations during the course and follow-up communication with course participants. One participant shared the

following in a personal message: “Dear pastor Stefan, I am so thankful for the whole journey of this training! I can truly say that it helped me figure out how to start discipling people. I am praying to God that, as soon as possible, he will send to me or show me a person that I can start pouring my life into and teach them everything I know about God.” Another participant boldly stood up during one of the course sessions and stated in front of the whole class: “I don't know about you all, but I am going to make at least one disciple in this life!” Finally, over half of the participants either did not answer the question or stated that there was nothing that they thought was missing from the training (Question 9). The rest of the participants wrote in summary that everything was great and that they looked forward to the next course the author would be teaching.

Final Words

This thesis-project was a direct response to the mandate of the Great Commission and the call to the Church to make disciples of Jesus. In addition, it was a practical response to the need Jesus identified as he looked at the crowds which reminded him of a picture of sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36), namely the insufficiency of and the need for more workers (Matthew 9:37-38). The aim was to evaluate the current state of affairs of disciple-making among local Gypsy pastors and church leaders and to give them the opportunity to receive high-quality biblical training in the hope that it would help them gain the necessary knowledge and it would mobilize them to initiate disciple-making efforts in their local faith communities. As defined earlier in this work, the *hypothesis* for this thesis-project was namely that organized formal disciple-making training would help Gypsy pastors and church leaders to acquire knowledge and

mobilize them to make first steps into engaging intentionally people from their churches in discipling relationships.

The observations of the author and his team as well as the results from the two surveys the participants took suggest highly that this thesis-project achieved its goal. This group of Gypsy church leaders who persisted in their participation in the formal disciple-making training and completed the course with all its requirements attested to their increased knowledge and understanding of the Great Commission. They expressed a higher level of preparedness and, as a result of the training, they felt not only well-equipped to launch disciple-making efforts in their local faith communities but also encouraged and ready to make practical steps towards engaging others in disciple-making relationships and pouring their lives into their lives in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

If this thesis-project was a way to mobilize Gypsy church leaders to initiate disciple-making efforts in the local faith communities, it also ended up inspiring and mobilizing the author himself and his team to persevere and continue training Gypsy pastors in order to establish a model of training upon which disciple-making among Gypsy churches could develop and be widely embraced in Bulgaria and beyond. What is more, this thesis-project played a critical role in the author's personal growth in his current and future mission work as a pastor, a missionary, an educator and disciple-maker. It also provided invaluable feedback for the future of theological and disciple-making training in the southeastern part of Bulgaria and in the whole country. Based on the positive results from this thesis-project, the author intends to conduct another disciple-making course within six months from the pilot project and to replicate the process with improvements in the survey material and the teaching content, thus taking into account all the feedback, observations, and conclusions that this thesis-project provided.

The Great Commission remains the primary calling of the Church in mission and one of the main reasons for the existence of the Church – the evangelization of the world. Although often forgotten and ignored, the mandate of Jesus, his own example of making disciples and the example of the early church remain the only viable way for the global church and for local churches to faithfully fulfill their calling and to reach out to the world with the Good News of Jesus. But unless more and more workers are trained and equipped, disciple-making would not achieve its intended purpose. For this reason, this author and his team have committed to the training of disciple-makers among the Gypsy minority of Bulgaria. Their hope is that small steps and the training of a few would fuel a disciple-making movement which will develop and grow, one training at a time, in anticipation of the emergence of a larger harvesting workforce able to reach out to the nation with the Good News. The poignant words of Robert E. Coleman capture perfectly this conviction and this hope and offer a wonderful way of concluding this thesis-project:

> The key to the final harvest is found in the quality and the supply of laborers obeying the mandate of Christ. It does not matter how few their numbers are in the beginning, provided that they reproduce and teach their disciples in turn to do the same. As simple as it may seem, this is the way His Church will ultimately triumph. He has no other plan. Our Lord did not come in His incarnate body to evangelize the world; He came to make it possible for the world to be saved through His atoning sacrifice. But on his way to Calvary, He made sure that His disciples were equipped by strategy and vision to gather the harvest.[6]

[6] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle: Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 64.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION LETTER

Dear friend,

If each day of the year over the face of the earth some 3,000 people came to Christ, in order to reach the whole world with the gospel it would take **more than 7,305 years**! What can be more disheartening than this! But what is the solution? **What can we do as leaders to help the church in reaching our neighborhoods, our city, and our whole region with the Good News of Jesus?**

On behalf of **KOINONIA CENTER** we would like to invite you to the course: **"The Great Commission: How to Make Disciples of Jesus."** This course will help you find answers to these questions and will give you practical guidance on how to begin discipling and fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

We will be teaching this course for the first time in Bulgaria and we hope you will take advantage of this unique opportunity. On the next page, you can learn more about our teacher as well as about the fee for the course and the main topics that will be studied.

The course will be held in the "Ring" Conference Room at the Sports Palace Hotel in the city of Sliven in four consecutive Saturday sessions – 9am to 1pm on the following dates:

Session 1 – September 16, 2023
Session 2 – September 23, 2023
Session 3 – September 30, 2023
Session 4 – October 07, 2023

Participants who attend all four sessions and complete all the requirements for the course will receive a certificate of completion. After the end of the course, our team will be available for individual meetings and follow-up with additional disciple-making guidance.

Registration:
The seats for the course are limited. You can register by using the online registration form published on our Facebook page or you can also contact us and register by phone or email.

Registration deadline: August 30, 2023

Participation fee:
The fee for the course is $40, but Christians committed to the fulfillment of the Great Commission have generously offered scholarships to all participants, which brings the fee to only $15 to be paid upon arrival on the day of the first session of the course.

Main course topics:

- In-depth study of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) as the most important command of Jesus for reaching the world with the Good News
- Detailed study of nine principles on which Jesus built his whole strategy for reaching the world with the gospel
- Special focus:
    - How Jesus became a servant
    - The way Jesus selected his disciples
    - The role of personal relationship as foundation for disciple-making
    - The call of Jesus to spiritual growth, holiness and maturity
    - Jesus' most important approach to teaching and disciple-making
    - The critical role of supervision and spiritual mentorship
    - The way to evaluate our disciple-making efforts
    - The role of the Holy Spirit in disciple-making

Our teacher for the course:
Stefan Sultanov converted to the Christian faith in 1991 during the spiritual awakening after the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria. This was the time when his active ministry started.

In Bulgaria, he holds a Master's degree in French language and literature. In the United States, he has graduated from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Christian Counseling degrees. Currently he is finishing a Doctor of Ministry degree in the field of outreach and discipleship at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

Stefan Sultanov's 32-year ministry experience includes: disciple-making, teaching courses in theology and practical ministry, preaching God's Word, training indigenous pastors and preachers, outreach to college students, and missions pastor of a local church.

APPENDIX B

COURSE ONLINE REGISTRATION FORM

REGISTRATION

COURSE: THE GREAT COMMISSION

When: 9am-1pm
Session 1 – September 16, 2023
Session 2 – September 23, 2023
Session 3 – September 30, 2023
Session 4 – October 07, 2023

Where:
"Ring" Conference Room
Sports Palace Hotel
Sliven 8804

My first name: ……..……

My last name: ……..….

My church: ……..…

My city / village / suburb: ……..

My role in the church is:

☐ Pastor

☐ Preacher

☐ Deacon / Elder

☐ Youth leader

☐ Worship leader

☐ Other ……..

My phone number: ……..

My email address: ……

I am mostly using:

☐ Viber

☐ WhatApp

I would like to be included in a chat-group and receive information concerning this course:

☐ Yes

☐ No

I would like to be included in a chat-group and receive information about future events of *Koinonia Center*:

☐ Yes

☐ No

My biggest questions about discipleship and disciple-making are: ……...

……

……

……....

I agree to pay the fee of $15 for the course:

☐ Yes

SUBMIT

APPENDIX C

SURVEY ONE

The Great Commission: How to Make Disciples of Jesus

Survey 1

September 16, 2023

Stefan Sultanov

My course number _____

1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"… (Mark only one answer that best describes your response):**

    a. I am not sure what it means.

    b. I have a vague idea of what it means.

    c. I am familiar with the idea.

    d. I am well aware of what it means.

2. **Have you ever been discipled? (circle one)**

    Yes / No

3. **Have you ever participated in any formal training or course on disciple-making? (circle one)**

    Yes / No

    If yes, when and what kind of training? ……

    ……

4. **Have you preached or taught on what it means *to be* a disciple of Jesus? (circle one)**

    Frequently Fairly Often Occasionally Rarely Never

5. **Have you preached or taught on *making disciples* of Jesus?**

Frequently Fairly Often Occasionally Rarely Never

6. **Have you been in disciple-making relationships with people you have trained in the past? (circle one)**

Yes / No

7. **Are you in a disciple-making relationship with someone you are currently training? (circle one)**

Yes / No

8. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel? (circle one)**

Very Important Important Somewhat Important Unimportant

9. **Of the churches in your area, how many are you aware of that are involved in making disciples of Jesus? (circle one)**

All Many More than a few A few None

10. **If you ever wanted to train disciples but you did not, what prevented you from doing it? (Mark only one answer that best describes your response)**

a. Lack of knowledge

b. Lack of church finances

c. Lack of time

d. Lack of prior experience

e. Other: ……..

APPENDIX D

COURSE WORKBOOK

THE GREAT COMMISSION

HOW TO MAKE DISCIPLES OF JESUS AND RECOVER THE HEARTBEAT OF GOD FOR A PERISHING WORLD

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is designed to help pastors and other church leaders to become acquainted with the importance of evangelism as primary work of the mission and kingdom of God. Very special focus is given to the nature and process of disciple-making in fulfillment of the command of Jesus found in the Great Commission. Theoretical and practical aspects of the process of multiplication in disciple-making are emphasized as the primary way of expanding the kingdom of God and reaching out to the world with the gospel.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

After completing this course the student will:

1. Be familiar with the importance of evangelism as the primary mission of God's kingdom.
2. Be able to articulate and discuss the life and ministry of Jesus and the ministry patterns of the Early Church as a model for the fulfillment of the Great Commission in today's world.
3. Be fully acquainted with and ready to apply in real-life ministry nine principles of disciple-making from the life and ministry of Jesus.
4. Understand the nature of disciple-making as a lifestyle.
5. Have a better grasp of the crucial role of follow-up in preserving and growing the fruit of evangelistic efforts.
6. Be equipped with specific disciple-making tools.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Four consecutive sessions will be held from 9am to 1pm on the following dates:

Session 1 – September 16, 2023
Session 2 – September 23, 2023
Session 3 – September 30, 2023
Session 4 – October 7, 2023

METHODS OF STUDY

- Classroom lectures
- Classroom discussions with the teacher and classmates
- Reading materials and handouts

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Required Reading**

   The student will read the following book in its entirety and will turn in a reading report with number of pages read.

   Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2008.

2. **Scripture Memorization**

   Scripture memorization is undoubtedly one of the best ways to become better acquainted with the text of the Bible and to be better prepared for effective evangelistic and disciple-making work. In addition, it certainly has tremendous value for one's own spiritual nurture! In order to start developing this spiritual discipline, the student will memorize the following basic Bible verses as part of the course:

   - Matthew 28:18-20
   - 2 Timothy 2:2

3. **Written Assignment**

   - Farewell Letter
     Student will write a letter (brief or not so brief) in which he/she will address someone they have discipled as if this were the last time they have the opportunity to address this person (like Paul writing to his disciple Timothy in his Second Letter to Timothy.

GRADING

Attendance …… 30%
Required Reading ……. 30%
Farewell Letter ……...… 20%
Scripture Memorization Test ……..… 10%
Participation in class …….. 10%

Total ……..100%

Students who complete all the requirements for the course in their entirety, both attendance and assignments, will receive a certificate of completion.

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

"This is the New Testament picture of evangelism – that hand reaching down to the lost with the offer of life. Until that hand is offered, there is no hope – and there is no Gospel. The good news is that God has acted to save a people for Himself."[1]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

<u>The Big Question:</u>

How are we going to be able to accomplish the task of evangelism?

[1] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 10.

THE GREAT COMMISSION

"This is called the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). It gave marching orders to the church. Any activity which does not contribute to its fulfillment has no enduring relevance to the world." [2]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

"[16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.

[18] And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

[19] Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:16-20 [3]

- **A COMMAND TO THE CHURCH**
    - Matthew 28:18-20
    - Mark 16:15-16
    - Luke 24:46-49 & Acts 1:8
    - John 20:21-22

    - Matthew underlines how to measure and evaluate our work.

[2] Robert E. Coleman in his Foreword to Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 23.

[3] *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008). All quotations in this workbook are from the ESV translation of the Bible.

- **CONTEXT**
    - Key to understanding Scripture and the Great Commission.
    - Time (Matthew 28)
    - Place (Matthew 28:16)
    - Last words matter
        - Most memorable
        - Practicality and foundational theological understanding
    - Brevity compensated by richness and depth

> ***"Discipling men and women is the priority around which our lives should be oriented."[4]***
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[4] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1987), 9.

- **The reaction of the Twelve**

    - Worship

    - Doubt / inadequacy / hesitation

- **The interaction**

    - The disciples

    - Jesus comes up to the disciples and speaks to them.

- **SETTING: "All Authority … Has Been Given To Me" (Matthew 28:18)**

    - A key declaration before any call to action

    - The most overlooked part of the Great Commission

> ***"But without it, the Great Commission and any ministry of the church would be stripped of its underlying authority and would be lacking the driving force for its eternal purpose."***
>
> ***Stefan Sultanov***

        - Matthew 4:8-10 – The final challenge before Jesus – to claim authority and power over this world by falling down and worshipping the devil.

        - Matthew 11:27, Jesus declared that "all things have been handed over to me by my Father."

    - The magnitude of Jesus' authority

    - A *fait accompli*[5]*: the fulfillment of the Great Commission is guaranteed by God himself*

[5] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants: New Testament, Vol. 3* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2017), 302.

- **The secret of the Great Commission**

> ***"Here is the secret of the Great Commission. It is finally God's work, not ours. We are merely the channel through which the Spirit of Christ makes disciples."[6]***
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

- The work of God, not ours.
- A call to humility
- A call to boldness

> ***"This fallen, broken world is now Christ's world. It is the theater of his redemption, the place of his mission, over which he has total authority for the accomplishment of his saving work. The rule of Christ will bring this present world to the glory of the world to come."[7]***
>
> ***Edmund Clowney***

[6] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 132.
[7] Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 172.

- **Therefore (Matthew 28:19)**

    - A bridge to the Great Commission

> ***"These verses do not contain the Great Suggestion, but the Great Commission. Evangelism is an essential part of God's plan to save people."*** [8]
>
> ***Dr. Timothy Beougher***

    - The Great Commission as the *modus operandi* of the church

    - "Based on that – ***THEREFORE*** – go and make disciples… Because JESUS IS LORD, therefore…

[8] Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 50.

- **Make disciples (Matthew 28:19)**

    - Matthew 28:19-20 – four action grammatical forms, one of which is the main verb and the other three are participles.

    - The main verb obviously carries the main thrust of the mandate while the participles denote subordinate actions.

    - "Make disciples" in the imperative is that main verb which drives and guides the rest.

    - Disciples, not converts

        - The mandate is "expressed not in terms of means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to "make disciples."[9]

        - Conversion is followed by commitment to discipleship.

        - The replication of the process of disciple-making will achieve the ultimate goal of evangelism – to bring the world to the feet of Christ.

[9] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1115.

- **A Dual Scope – Of All Nations and All Believers (Matthew 28:19)**

    - **All nations**

        - Words of Jesus with significant theological implications

        - Matthew's universal mission in view

"Those, who "were previously exceptions are now the focus." [10]

Scot McKnight

- Jesus' initial mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:6, 15:24).

- The followers of Jesus will extend the gospel to all the nations.

    - **All believers**

        - A command to the disciples *as a group* – a command to the whole church.

"Making disciples is not a special gift or calling; it is a lifestyle of obedience incumbent on the whole body of Christ, the church." [11]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[10] Scot McKnight, *"Gospel of Matthew"* in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 535.

[11] Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel: The Theology Behind the Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 11.

- **Go (Matthew 28:19)**

    - "go and tell," not "come and hear."

> ***The local church has "subtly reversed the Great Commission; instead of 'go and tell,' it has become 'come and hear'." [12]***
>
> ***Dr. Timothy Beougher***

    - From the nations coming to Jerusalem to a mission moving away from Jerusalem to the nations.

    - The attendant circumstance participle "going/go"

        - Derives its mood from the main verb ("make disciples").

        - A prerequisite condition for the action of the main verb to take place.

[12] Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 12.

- **Baptizing them (Matthew 28:19)**

    - "Baptizing" – the participle of means introduces water baptism as one of the ways in which the Great Commission is to be carried out.

    - Baptism – a sign of the New Covenant

    - Foundational part of discipleship and disciple-making.

    - The Christian's union with Christ in his burial and resurrection

        - The disciple's new life (Romans 6:1-6)

        - Commitment to follow Christ

    - The order: baptism preceding "teaching"

> ***"Baptism is the point of enrollment into a process of learning which is never complete."*** [13]
>
> ***R.T. France***

[13] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1116.

- **Trinitarian formula in one name!**

    - Echo from Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 4:21-23; John 1:32-34)

    - Matthew 28:19

        - Jesus as the glorified Son and second person of the Trinity

        - The Holy Spirit as equal to the Father and the Son

        - All three persons acting unanimously in the commissioning of the disciples

- Baptism is not the end goal of the Great Commission!

- A life-long journey of learning and spiritual growth

- **Teaching them (Matthew 28:20)**

    - "Teaching" – another adverbial participle of means – by what means the Great Commission will be accomplished.

    - A journey of growth and reaching full maturity in Christ

    - A command and a curriculum

    - Teaching with the goal of obedience!

    - John 14:15 and covenantal expectations

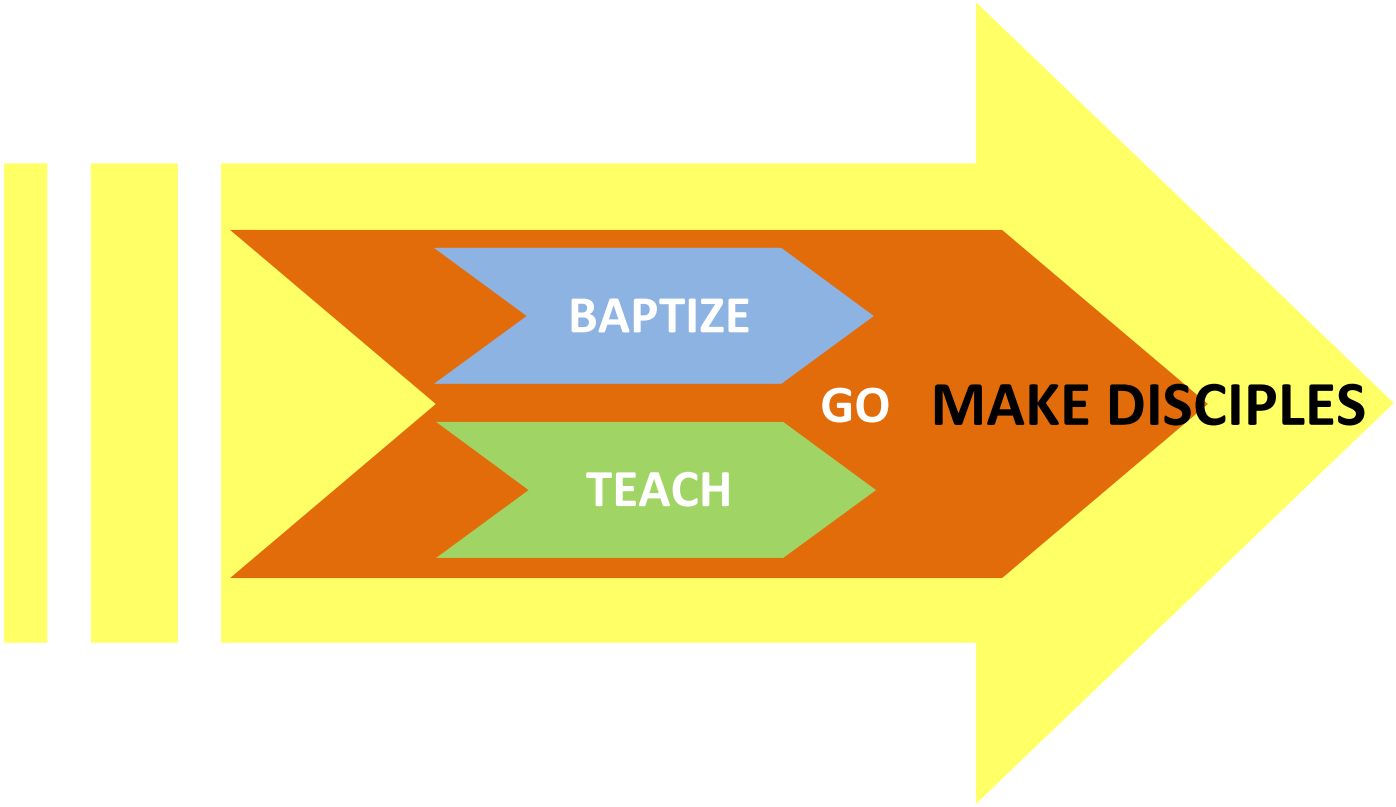
    - Truly, "to be a disciple is to obey Jesus' teaching."[14]

    - Galatians 4:19 – "until Christ is formed in you."

"To be a disciple is to obey Jesus' teaching." 14

R.T. France

[14] R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1119.



- **The example**
  - Jesus' primary focus in his ministry – making disciples!
  - The primary focus of the teaching of the gospels
  - Jesus' disciple-making example – a model for us to follow!

- **The evaluation**

    - Are our ministry efforts producing anything that fulfills the Great Commission of our Lord?

    - Can we identify a growing group of dedicated Christians around us that are reaching the world with the gospel as a result of our ministry?

Are our ministry efforts producing anything that fulfills the Great Commission of our Lord?

- **The focus**

    - The challenge of difference between Jesus' time and a changing world today

    - *Methods and programs change*

    - ***Principles do not change!***

    - The gospels – our best source of model and inspiration

    - Jesus revealed God's plan and strategy for world conquest!

- **His strategy**
    - A well-defined plan as lifestyle!
    - Interwoven principles
- **His presence: “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)**
    - The Greek expression points to the idea of a whole length of duration.
    - The gospel story has come full circle.
        - Jesus’ birth – “Immanuel” – “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)
        - The Great Commission - Jesus’ assurance to be with his disciples
        - As a covenant mediator, after the covenant institution (Matthew 26-27), Jesus establishes his ongoing presence among his people.

- Jesus' powerful assurance is pronounced in light of the mandate of the Great Commission.

- An important theological *inclusio*

    - On the basis of *Jesus' authority*, the disciples can launch their disciple-making efforts.

    - On the basis of *Jesus' promised presence* the disciples will have the empowerment to fulfill the mandate and that their efforts will never fall short of succeeding.

"It was the assurance of the present reality they [the disciples] were to experience while going forth to make disciples." [15]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- The last words of Jesus – "the assurance of the present reality they [the disciples] were to experience while going forth to make disciples."[15]

- Acts 1:8; 2:1-4 – The Holy Spirit comes to dwell ***in*** the disciples and to empower them for the mission road ahead.

[15] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 138.

- **It Is All In The Obedience**

    - The Great Commission is an imperative!

    - Ignoring or neglecting Jesus' mandate to make disciples is disobedience to God and to his calling.

    - Jesus modeled obedience for his disciples and nothing less than obedience is required of them.

    - The level of commitment to the Great Commission becomes a measurement of obedience to God himself.

    - Gatherers and scatterers (Matthew 12:30; Luke 11:23).

    - Making disciples is "a lifestyle of obedience incumbent on the whole body of Christ, the church."[16]

> ***Making disciples is "a lifestyle of obedience incumbent on the whole body of Christ, the church."*** [16]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[16] Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel*, 11.

THE NINE PRINCIPLES OF DISCIPLE-MAKING

FROM THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

THE PRINCIPLE OF INCARNATION
JESUS BECAME A SERVANT

- **The foundation for everything in disciple-making**

    - All other principles would be absolutely meaningless except for the fact that Jesus came and identified with us.

    - Jesus renounced his own rights, he humbled himself and took the form of the servant and became obedient to death.

      Philippians 2:5-11 (ESV)

      "[5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in **the form** of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but ***emptied himself***, taking **the form** of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, [8] he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

- **The cross**

    - It was accepted by Jesus from the very beginning and before the foundation of the earth (1 Peter 1:19-20; John 17:24; Revelation 13:8).

    - Each step of the way was a conscious acceptance of God's eternal purpose.

    - Calvary was a display of God's love against his own justice.

- **A hundred percent God and a hundred percent human**

    - Jesus experienced human limitations.

    - We know little on Jesus' early life.

- **An unlikely one**
    - Jesus was not a member of the Levitical priesthood.
    - Jesus was not a part of the religious establishment or the official hierarchy of the institutions of his time.

- **The problem – People lost and scattered – Matthew 9:36**
    - Jesus talked and ministered to the people.
    - The people were lost and scattered like sheep without a shepherd but the tragedy was that there was no one to lead them.
        - Sheep
            - Lovable creatures and they know how to follow a leader.
            - Without leadership, they tend to wander off and get lost.
            - Sheep cannot be driven from behind. They must be led!

"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."

Matthew 9:36

- People
  - Without proper leadership, people get confused, wander off, get lost, hurt themselves and one another.
  - Jesus saw there was no one to lead the crowds!
  - The tragedy of religious leadership who themselves were lost!

- **The solution – Pray for workers (Matthew 9:38)**
  - Pray for the solution to the problem in light of the Great Commission!
  - The solution are workers who multiply and are ready to win the whole world!
  - No other plan!

Pray for the solution to the problem in light of the Great Commission!

  - To take someone like a sheep and lead them to Christ and allow the Holy Spirit to transform them – that is the miracle of regeneration!

- **We must take the servant's mantle**

    - We begin at the cross!

> ***"Spiritual parents are servants of their spiritual children."***[17]
>
> ***Ajith Fernando***

    - We pour out our life to God and commit ourselves fully to him and to his Kingdom service!

- **Serving people brings opportunities to disciple**

    - Identifying a felt need and attending to it.

    - Identify the spiritual need and attend to it!

- **A shepherd goes after lost sheep**

[17] Ajith Fernando, *Discipling in a Multicultural World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 48.

THE PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION
JESUS LOOKED FOR DISCIPLES

- **People were Jesus' method of winning the world!**

    - The principle is emerging at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry.

> ***"Men were to be his method of winning the world to God!"***[18]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

    - **John 1**

        - Jesus' initial encounter with and calling of the first disciples.

        - Jesus' active ministry begins in the midst of a revival and heightened spiritual interest.

        - "to come alive"

[18] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2006), 21.

- Dry bones – Ezekiel 37!

- In Jesus' parable of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15), the son that was lost comes back alive.

- Jesus resists the lure of popularity and serving at the crowd's whim.

- John the Baptist's later confusion about the identity and role of Jesus (Matthew 11)

- Jesus' invitation: "come along and see!" (John 1:39)

- <u>Before even performing a miracle or preaching a sermon, Jesus invites to himself people who want to follow him and learn!</u>

- Philip and Nathaniel: "Come and see for yourself." (John 1:46)

- **"Come and see" is the core strategy of evangelism (John 1).** ***That is our strategy too!***

"But I am passionately committed to discipleship within the church, and I am just as passionate in my conviction that when done right, discipleship will produce the leaders every church needs to succeed. God has placed leaders within every church because He cares for the people the church needs to reach. These leaders often sit in the pews, waiting to be developed, to be released into ministry, but often they never are. Our churches are filled with diamonds in the rough, and when pastors and church leaders begin to take seriously our mandate to disciple our people, these leaders will emerge."[19]

Jim Putman

- **The smaller the group, the greater the opportunity to learn**
    - We only have recorded the calling of a few of the disciples.
        - The fishermen – Peter & Andrew; James & John, the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 4:18-22)
        - Matthew (Matthew 9:9-13)
    - Selection of the Twelve (Luke 6:13-17)

"... he called his disciples and chose from them twelve."

Luke 6:13

[19] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010), 18-19.

- The principle: Selecting ***a more manageable group.***
    - The inner circle
        - Healing of the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:37)
        - The Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1)
        - The Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37)
        - A special one – John 20:2
    - Attention to others, focus on the Twelve!

- **Jesus does not rush in selection!**

- **Jesus does not rush in anticipation of quick results! Sacred patience!**

- **Jesus' selection criteria**
    - No Levites, no college or seminary graduates, no religious leaders.
    - Later, Jesus picks a "seminarian" – the apostle Paul.

- **Teachability!**

  - **<u>Desire</u> to learn and grow in the likeness of Jesus**

  - **<u>Readiness</u> to learn and grow in the likeness of Jesus**

  - **Factors of teachability**

    - Readiness to change

      Is the person willing to change or he/she is only ready to learn for the sake of learning?

    - Openness to experience / competency

      Does the person want to learn new things?

    - Consistency

      Is the person willing to commit to a process of learning and growth and to what degree?

- **Jesus' practical approach**

    - Focus on leaders!

> ***"He needed people who could lead the multitudes."*** [20]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

    - Begin with prayer!

        - Prayer for God to send workers to his harvest.

        - Prayer is when we cannot do it but also an affirmation of our faith!

    - **Keep a low profile!**

        - Don't shout about it. Live it out!

        - Matthew 6:1-18 as a ministry principle of doing things "in secret" and without putting up a show for people to see.

[20] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 28.

- **The challenge today**
    - Obsession with numbers
    - Focus on the multitudes

> ***"Victory is never won by the multitudes."*** [21]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

> ***"Here is where we must begin just like Jesus.***
> ***It will be slow, tedious, painful, and probably unnoticed by people at first,***
> ***but the end result will be glorious, even if we don't live to see it.***
> ***Seen this way, though, it becomes a big decision in the ministry.***
> ***We must decide where we want our ministry to count –***
> ***in the momentary applause of popular recognition***
> ***or in the reproduction of our lives in a few chosen people***
> ***who will carry on our work after we have gone."*** [22]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

THE BIG QUESTION

How do you actually do it?

[21] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 30.
[22] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 32.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ASSOCIATION
JESUS STAYED WITH HIS DISCIPLES

The soul needs neither tea nor coffee. The soul needs a conversation. Coffee is only the pretext.

A Turkish Proverb

- **Jesus stayed close to his growing disciples**
    - For the most part of his 3-year ministry, Jesus made it a point ***to be*** with his disciples.

"And behold,
I am with you always,
to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:20

    - A principle visible from creation
    - If you are born, you can be discipled and you can disciple others in fulfilling the Great Commission.

- **The simplicity of the approach**

    - Jesus was with his disciples as much as possible.

    - Informal nature of the relationship

    - Jesus simply invited his disciples to be with him and to follow him.

> ***Jesus' "teaching methods were relational in nature. Jesus knew exactly what He was doing with His disciples. He invested His life in the Twelve. He chose to be in relationship with His disciples because He understood that more is 'caught' than taught."[23]***
>
> ***Jim Putman***

    - The disciples recognized as having been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

> ***"And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."***
>
> ***Acts 4:13***

    - The foundation for Jesus' teaching was his daily lifestyle!

[23] Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 49.

- **Jesus worked with his disciples!**
  - Jesus did very little alone!
  - Involve disciples in your ministry!

- **The Principle of Association**
  - The most obvious principle in education!
  - The unique relationship between teacher and student
  - Relationship is the key to making disciples!

"This relationship provided the environment for their training. The apostolic church did not erect colleges or theological seminaries, or even set up educational seminars. They had instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith and life, but not in formal classes or institutional programs. To mold the life of their members, they simply got learners and teachers together in natural settings, where they lived and worked every day." [24]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[24] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 62.

- **Make it a priority to invite disciples to be a part of your daily life!**

- **Relationship is the most natural way of learning!**

- **The more casual the relationship, the better!**

    - Casual fellowship – the joy of a relationship

    - Bringing some structure adds *intentionality*!

    - Relationships!

> ***"Discipleship demands intentionality and relationship – by which each person is invested in specifically. This cannot happen in the worship service."***[25]
>
> ***Jim Putman***

- **More extended periods for fellowship and reflection**

[25] Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 23.

- **Relationships are incarnational**

    - Relationship is what brings discipleship to life!

    - Without natural relationship, there is little real life application and no accountability!

> ***"Without true relationship, discipleship is not possible."***[26]
>
> ***Jim Putman***

    - And relationships are incarnational: Jesus came in flesh and blood to be with his creation!

        - John 1:14

        - Jesus embodied the full presence of God in human flesh, so he can reveal God to us and bring us back to him (Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1:1-4 esp.3).

    - There is no substitute for physical presence!

[26] Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 47.

- **The power of relationship**

    - The disciples get to discover who Jesus is and are ready to follow him because of his personal presence with them for over 3 years of ministry.

    - Jesus died because he knows us so personally and intimately. Jesus' disciples were ready to die for him because they knew him personally as well.

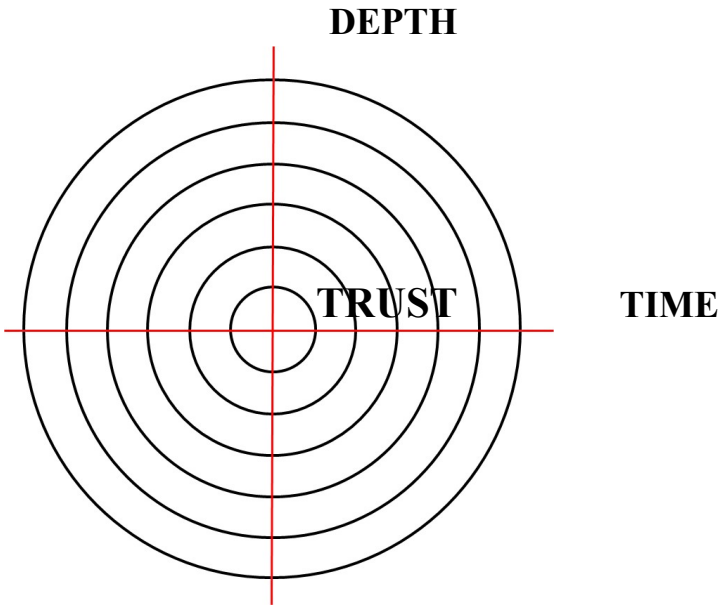
- **Personal relationships contribute to higher commitment**

    - Personal relationship could be a main factor in what determines the level of commitment.

    - Personal relationship is a powerful tool with incredible potential.

    - Personal relationship is to point others to Christ, not to ourselves!

- **Factors in relationships**
    - **Time** – the more time, the more depth.
    - **Depth** – Critically important for growth
    - **Vulnerability** – the more depth, the more vulnerability
        - Bear the risk! Overcome your personal fears! It is worth it!
        - Avoiding self-disclosure – main reason for church leaders to avoid getting involved in disciple-making relationships.



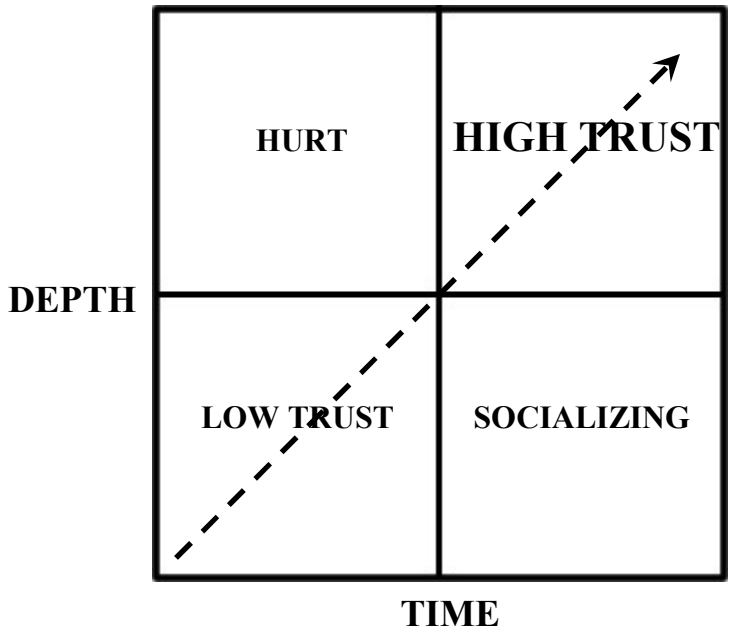
- **Trust – from simple interaction to a deeper relationship**

    - Trust is the glue that holds any relationship together.

    - Trust is the single most critical ingredient that transforms a simple interaction into a real relationship.

    - Building trust requires a lot of time!

    - Short-circuiting the process leads to frustration, destruction, hurt, broken relationships or simply to nothing at all.



- More into his ministry, Jesus spends increasingly more time with his disciples!
    - The gospels devote a lot more attention to the final months and especially to the final week of the life and ministry of Jesus.
    - After the Resurrection Jesus appeared to his disciples to solidify and to instill in them more confidence about the ongoing relationship after his ascension.

- **Double benefit**
    - Jesus ministers to the masses while his disciples are with him and he is training them.

- **Our challenges today**
    - Personal relationships - at the core of discipleship and the fellowship of the church as the body of Christ.
    - Wrong focus on numbers
    - Little to no follow-up

"New Christians are likely to leave the church within the first six months of faith if they don't develop seven significant relationships with the congregation at that time." [27]

Ed Stetzer

- The new believer needs a friend to help them face the problems of life, to learn the Word and how to live it out!

- Jesus spent 3 years with his disciples. How much time are you ready to spend?

[27] Ed Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches: Planting A Church That's Biblically Sound And Reaching People In Culture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 290.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CONSECRATION
JESUS EXPECTS OBEDIENCE

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."

Matthew 11:29

- **Following Jesus means learning of him.**
    - The principle of consecration means that we obey the Word of God.
    - Jesus expected obedience: "Come after me / Follow me."
    - Those who followed Jesus were called "disciples" and only much later were they called "Christians" (Acts 11:26).
    - First a call to follow, then profession of faith (John 1:41, 45, 49; Luke 5:8; Matthew 16:15)!

"Jesus did not urge his disciples to commit their lives to a doctrine, but to a person who was the doctrine, and only as they continued in his Word could they know the truth (John 8:31-32)."[28]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[28] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 48.

- **Emphasize the practical aspects of faith and lifestyle**

    - God's invitation to discipleship was never a theoretical abstraction. Faith was the way to live, a ***lifestyle***.

    - As the disciples followed Jesus, they continued learning.

        - It was that simple. And that's why we tend to overlook it or completely miss it.

        - All the disciples had to do was to learn by following.

        - The disciples were slow learners. But Jesus was patient.

> ***"Jesus did not have the time nor the desire to scatter himself on those who wanted to make their own terms of discipleship."***[29]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[29] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 46.

- **Embrace the Cross daily**
    - Matthew 16
        - Peter's historical confession
        - *Christ* will build his church.
        - When the disciples faithfully witness to their faith in God, God will raise up the church and nothing would be able to stop it.
    - Jesus announces his death and resurrection.
        - Peter is quick to object.
        - Take up your cross and follow Jesus.

- The principle of consecration: The cross is our way of life, offering ourselves as a living sacrifice.

    - There is no end to spiritual learning and growth.

    - Faith is a way of life and practical obedience to God.

"Jesus was making men to lead His church to conquest, and no one can ever be a leader until first he has learned to follow a leader."[30]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- **Develop a discipline of devotion and work**

    - Incorporate spiritual disciplines that you keep (prayer, reading the Word of God, study, church involvement, ministry, giving, etc.) into disciple-making meetings!

    - The power of closed groups

        - State the rules and expectations when members join!

        - Follow up!

[30] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 50.

- The discipler's presence is critical!

- You can do many different things together (methods!).

    - Use a book as a devotion guide.

    - Pick up and read a passage of Scripture everyday along with a commentary.

    - Use Christian books on different subjects of the faith – prayer, new life, ministry, theology, etc. And then, always discuss these readings.

    - Memorizing Scripture!

    - Expect a disciple to be in a training relationship with someone else (a friend, a classmate, a co-worker) so they can start investing in the lives of others.

- Christ expects us to be obedient!
  - Low expectations – low commitment
    - No influence on the world
    - Holiness makes us different and attracts people to the gospel.
  - High expectations – higher commitment

- **Exposing disciples to situations that challenge commitment**
  - Expose disciples to situations that challenge your and their commitment.
  - It helps you and them to learn and to become bolder in ministry.

- **Obedience is an expression of love, not duty!**
    - Husband – wife / parents – children
    - John 21
        - Before the Great Commission
        - Jesus to Peter:
          "Simon, son of John,
          do you love me?"

          "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

          John 21:15-17
        - "Feed my sheep." – Love and care for those whom I love!
        - Peter: "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you."
    - All of the law is summed up in this: To love God and to love your neighbor as yourself.

- **Counting the cost**

    - Obedience involves change and transformation.

    - When you turn to Jesus, he is not asking you only to make a confession but to switch your allegiance to him and to start conforming to the standards of the Kingdom of God.

    - John 6:25-29 – "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus: "Believe in him whom he has sent."

    - ***You cannot be obedient to God without being ready to change or to be transformed by the Holy Spirit.***

> ***"There is no growth without change!"***
>
> ***Stefan Sultanov***

    - Following Jesus is all or nothing. Jesus expects a willing denial of self for him and for others.

- **Only a few willing to pay the price**

    - **John 6:60-69(71) –** What do we see here?

        -

        -

        - Jesus: “You do not want to leave too, *do you*?” (author’s translation)

        - Peter spoke for the Twelve: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:68-69)

        - What is Jesus’ reaction?

- What does this tell you about Jesus himself?
    -
    -
    -

    - Jesus was training leaders for the Kingdom of God! Nothing less than full commitment and readiness to pay the full price would be fit for his enterprise!

- **Jesus does not enlist volunteers but committed followers!**

"This required absolute obedience to the Master's will, even as it meant complete abandonment of their own."[31]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[31] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 50.

- Becoming a disciple of Jesus and a leader in the Kingdom of God was not a matter of convenience.

- ***Jesus did not waste time and energy with people who wanted to follow him on their own terms!***

  - Matthew 8:21-22

  - Luke 9:61-62

  - Luke 14:28-32

- **To obey means to learn!**

  - Slow learners

  - Matthew 16:13-28 – Peter's historical confession and his lack of spiritual insight

- Matthew 20:20-28 – The disciples' misunderstanding about their roles in the Kingdom of God!

- Luke 22:24-30 – The disciples lack of understanding of the idea of servanthood for the sake of others. (John 13:1-20 – Jesus washing the disciples' feet!).

- Luke 9:51-54 – The disciples were harsh in their judgment of situations and of people who disagreed with them.

- Mark 10:13 – The disciples did not allow children to approach Jesus.

- **A long-term enterprise**

  - Jesus kept working with the disciples as they continued learning.

  - Transformation takes time!

  - Transformation takes place in a relationship – the disciples are not learning a set of doctrines but they are getting to know a person – Jesus!

- **The example of Jesus**

    - Absolute obedience – the ruling principle in the life of the Master! Jesus lived and ministered in full submission to the will of the Father!

        - "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." (John 4:34)

        - "I seek not my own will, but the will of him who sent me." (John 5:30)

        - "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:39)

    - The cross – a culmination of Jesus' life journey of obedience to the Father

- **Obedience – On the principle**

    - *You can only be a good leader if you are a good follower! And you become a good follower by obedience to the Master!*

- The diagnosis of the church today:
    - So many professing Christians are underdeveloped in their spiritual growth and ineffective in their witness.
    - The church is frustrated with its witness to the world.

> ***"Among the clergy and laity alike there is a general indifference to the commandments of God, or at least, a kind of contended complacency with mediocrity."***[32]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

- Leaders to lead the way to commitment and a life of obedience to the commands of Jesus.
- Start right where Jesus himself started – choose a few people and start discipling them and teaching them obedience to Christ!

[32] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 51.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DEMONSTRATION
JESUS SHOWED THEM HOW TO MINISTER

"I have given you an example."

John 13:15

- **We must model the lesson for those we train**
    - Jesus showed his disciples how to live and minister.
    - Jesus taught more by example than by exhortation.
    - Demonstration is the most natural way of learning.

- **Jesus modeled the practice of prayer**

    - At first, the disciples of Jesus could observe how Jesus lived, talked, served, and how he prayed.

    - Luke 11:1-4 – "Lord, teach us to pray."

        - The disciples noticed the connection between the way Jesus prayed and his extraordinary ministry.

        - <u>Jesus did not impose prayer on them. He just kept praying and demonstrating that to them until they themselves asked to be taught.</u>

        - Prayer is the beginning of all things!

    - **The principle is too obvious to be missed!**

        - Jesus did not give them a book, a lecture or a conference on prayer. He gave them his example!

- **Jesus modeled the use of Scripture**

    - **Jesus was teaching his disciples to live with the authority of the Word of God!**

    - The disciples were gaining the understanding of how important it is to learn the Scriptures.

"You know,
when I hold this book (the Bible),
I feel like I am holding
the hand of Jesus!
I do not worship this book,
I worship Jesus.
But the Jesus I know is the one
I learned from this Book!
It is very real to me
to hold this Book."[33]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

    - How was Jesus teaching his disciples to honor the Word of God? By demonstration!

[33] Dr. Robert E. Coleman in class lectures, *Evangelism and Discipleship Course* at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte, Spring, 2009.

- **Jesus modeled evangelism**

    - The disciples learned ministry from Jesus through his demonstration.

    - The disciples learned about evangelism from Jesus through demonstration.

    - Unless our people in the church are discipled, they are not likely to get too concerned about personal evangelism!

- **Demonstration – the most natural way of teaching and learning**

    - Jesus took advantage of real life situations in which he demonstrated to the disciples how to live and serve.

    - The disciples were simply absorbing what they saw from the lifestyle and ministry of Jesus without even knowing that they were being trained to win people for the kingdom of God.

"His method... was to conceal the fact that he even had a method. He was his method."[34]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[34] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 66.

- **Demonstration always in action**

    - The disciples were always around Jesus and could see what he was up to.

    - The disciples could always ask Jesus for explanation.

        - Matthew 13:1-9; Mark 4:1ff – The Parable of the Sower

        - Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30 – The Rich Young Ruler

- **Demonstrate our priorities and values so disciples can see them**

    - Model the lesson and allow disciples to see your way of life, your values and your priorities lived out.

- **Demonstration includes sharing our inner life with disciples**

- **Weaknesses and failures can be means of teaching too**

    - In this process of disciple-making, disciples will also see your weaknesses, failures, which could also be means of teaching.

    - You don't have to be perfect in front of people. You have to be honest about yourself!

    - A deeper relationship allows for sharing with and confessing to one another our burdens, weaknesses, and failures!

- **A look at imitation**

    - Imitation is the most basic mechanism of learning.

    - Human development and learning, babies, sports, art

"People are looking for a demonstration, not an explanation."[35]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[35] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 68.

- **Creation**

  - Imitation is the foundational tool God uses to create the earth, the Garden of Eden, and humans. The Garden of Eden is a reflection of a heavenly temple.

  - The Jewish Temple is a replica of the heavenly pattern shown to Moses.

  - Humans created in God's image and his likeness (Genesis 1:26-27)!

- **Holiness and godliness**

  - Jesus – as Christians, our most basic calling is to Christ-likeness.

    - **Leviticus 19:2** "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy."

    - **1 Peter 1:14-16** "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

    - **Matthew 5:48** "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

- Paul & others

    - **1 Corinthians 4:16** "I urge you, then, be *imitators* of me."

    - **1 Corinthians 11:1** "Be *imitators* of me, as I am [*an imitator*] of Christ."

    - **Ephesians 5:1** "Therefore be *imitators* of God, as beloved children.

    - **Philippians 3:17** "Brothers, join in *imitating* me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us."

    - **Philippians 4:9** "What you have learned, and received and heard and seen in me – *practice these things*."

    - **1 Thessalonians 1:6-7** "And you became *imitators* of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, [7] so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

    - **1 Thessalonians 2:14** "For you, brothers, became *imitators* of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews"

- **2 Thessalonians 3:7-9** "[7] For you yourselves know how you ought to *imitate* us, because we were not idle when we were with you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. [9] It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to *imitate*."

- **2 Timothy 1:13** "*Follow the pattern* of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

- **Hebrews 6:12** "so that you may not be sluggish, but *imitators* of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

- **Hebrews 13:7** "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and *imitate* their faith."

- **Demonstration in focus**

    - Jesus did not ask anyone to be or to do anything before demonstrating it in his own life and ministry.

    - Through association and demonstration the teaching and learning process was constant. The disciples were learning in practice every day, every moment of the day.

- **Can we do it?**

> ***"This is the Master's method, and nothing else will ever suffice to train others to do his work."***[36]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

  - The only way to instill the Christian faith in someone and to train them to follow Christ and to make disciples in turn is to engage with disciples in an intentional personal relationship in which we demonstrate to them the Christian faith in the reality of our own life.

  - Demonstration – Jesus showed his disciples how to live and minister.

[36] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 68.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DELEGATION
JESUS GAVE THEM SOMETHING TO DO

- **We must intentionally involve disciples in ministry**

  - Once people have learned what to do, they need to put it in action.

> ***"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."***
>
> ***Matthew 4:19***

  - Jesus gave his disciples something to do.

  - Jesus proceeded with a lot of patience!

  - Jesus did not discourage the disciples from taking the initiative in ministry and welcomed their initial involvement (John 1:32-34).

> ***"The first invitation to the disciples to follow him said nothing about going out and evangelizing the world, although this was his plan from the beginning. His method was to get the disciples into a vital experience of God, and to show them how he worked, before telling them they had to do it."***[37]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

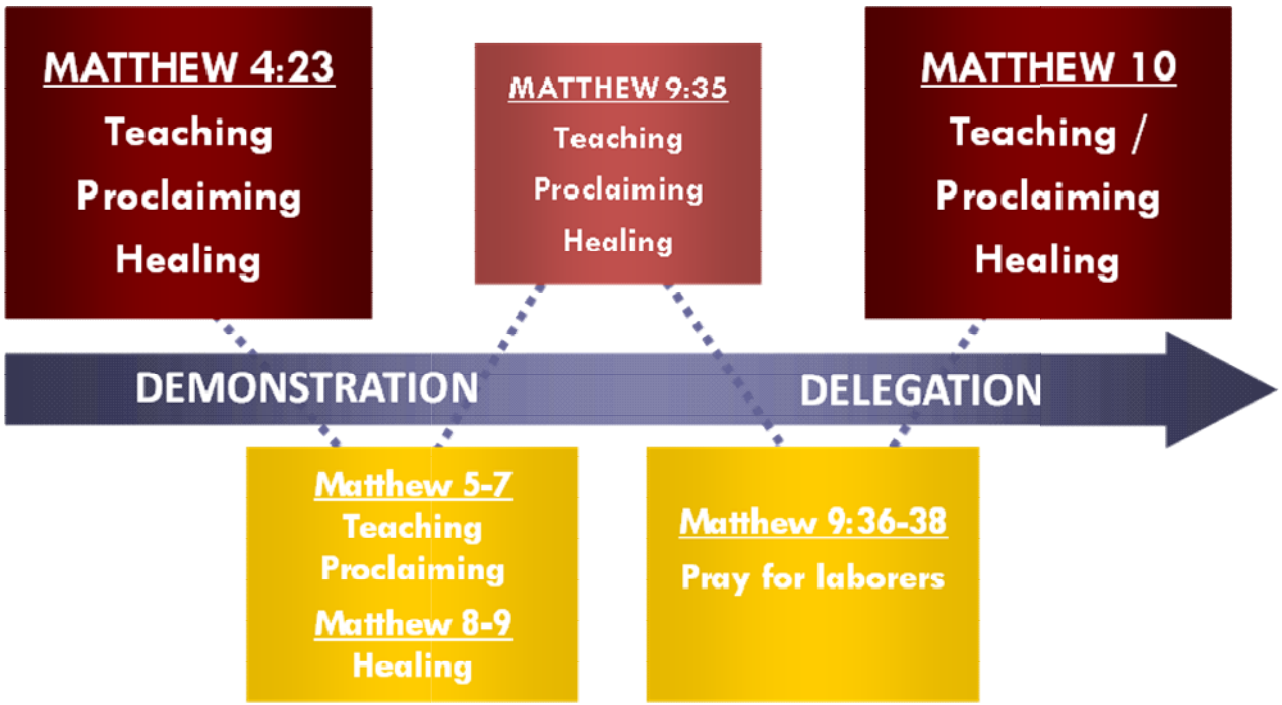
[37] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 71.

- **Jesus progressively involves the disciples in his ministry**
    - **Disciples ministering to Jesus' basic needs**
    - **Disciples Baptizing (John 4:2)**
        - After meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus and the disciples are on their way back to Galilee. Jesus is preaching but the disciples are baptizing!
    - **The Principle of Delegation!**
        - Get people involved in ministry!
        - Give people a sense of belonging to the ministry of the kingdom of God.
        - Allow people to use their skills, gifts, talents for the glory of God.

- **John 6:1-15 / Matthew 14:13-21 (cf. Mark 6:30-44 & Luke 9:10-17)**
  - **The disciples are ministering to people**

- **Matthew 10**
  - **Jesus commissions the disciples**

- **Matthew's pattern:**
  - The sequence:



- The commissioning

  Matthew 9:35-38 – pray for laborers

  Matthew 10 – the disciples sent out as laborers

  Matthew 10:7 – proclaim, heal

- **Matthew 10 instructions:**

  - **Jesus is articulating what he first demonstrated. We do not explain first but we act! Then we articulate!**

  - **Our challenge – the temptation to reverse the process**

- **Jesus sends out the seventy (Luke 10:1-12)**

  - Jesus sends out a larger group.

  - Same instructions given originally to the Twelve (Luke 10:2-16). Practice what they have already learned from the strategy of Jesus.

- **The ultimate command – the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20)**

    - The disciples could easily understand Jesus' command. They were ready to go and do it because they had been discipled!

    - **The Principle of Delegation: Involve disciples!**

- **Practical steps**

    - **Give disciples specific assignments**

        - Start by giving specific assignments.

        - Simple and clear just like with children.

    - **Involve disciples with their given skills and gifts**

        - Everybody can do something!

- As leaders it is our responsibility to help disciples find their skills.

- In some areas, a disciple would be more gifted than you.

In Acts 6
"the selection of the seven men indicates a willingness to delegate and a confidence that others could minister."[38]

Bill Hull

- Avoid the illusion that you can do it all!

"The tricky part of delegation is letting go of control."[39]

Edmund Chan

- With a little encouragement, the people of the church can do virtually anything.

[38] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading A Body Of Believers On The Journey Of Faith* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1990), 219.
[39] Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking That Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 109.

- **From simple tasks to more involving ministry and leadership roles**

    - After we allow disciples to prove themselves for a while, we can involve them in deeper ways and assign to them bigger responsibilities and leadership roles in the church.

    - **IMPORTANT:** Delegation is a principle of disciple-making, not a leadership tactic for its own sake.

    - Without delegation, all our ministry and disciple-making efforts will never produce lasting results!

THE PRINCIPLE OF SUPERVISION
JESUS MADE DISCIPLES ACCOUNTABLE

"Do you not yet perceive or understand?"

Mark 8:17

- **Jesus kept his disciples accountable**
    - As the ministry of Jesus unfolds more and more attention is given to the disciples. And the last week of the life and ministry of Jesus is given most attention.
    - Disciples need supervision along the road!
        - Structured / planned meetings are one of the most important discipleship tools.

- **Part of the strategy**
    - **Luke 9:1-10**
        - The disciples' first assignment (Luke 9:1-6).
        - A prearranged strategy for supervision (Luke 9:10).

- **Jesus focused on his disciples' attitudes and character traits**
    - **Luke 18:18-30**
        - The rich young ruler: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"
        - And the disciples were completely stunned.
        - Jesus spends as much time dealing with the question and explaining things as he spent with the original situation with the rich young ruler.

- **Jesus affirmed his disciples' strengths and self-worth**

    - **Luke 10:1-24**

        - Jesus sends the seventy (seventy-two?) (Luke 10:16).

        - The disciples come back and report on their success (Luke 10:17).

        - Jesus rejoices in the Spirit (10:21-22).

- Affirm people who are trying to do something well.

    - Jesus seizes the opportunity to teach the disciples a profound truth (Luke 10:18-20).

    - The principle of supervision: Talk about it! Interact, discuss practical applications.

"His plan of teaching, by example, assignment, and constant checkup, was calculated to bring out the best that was in them."[40]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[40] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 86.

- **Jesus used frequent times of review and asked questions**

    - **Matthew 17:14-20** (Mark 9:17-29; Luke 9:37-43)

        - The disciples' lack of spiritual discernment

        - Jesus uses the event as an opportunity to instruct his disciples on their approach and on reliance on God's faithfulness.

    - **Matthew 16:1-12** (Mark 8:1-21)

        - The disciples' lack of understanding

        - The hungry and confused disciples

        - Jesus uses the opportunity to correct the disciples about their lack of spiritual understanding (Matthew 16:8-12).

- **Mark 9:38-40 (& 41-50)**

    - The disciples' lack of patience

    - Someone outside the disciples' group is casting out demons in the name of Jesus. The disciples are upset.

    - Jesus uses the opportunity to provide feedback for them and warn them about a ministry danger they have to beware of.

- **Luke 9:51-54**

    - The disciples' impulsivity, intolerance, and exclusiveness

    - Jesus sends the disciples ahead of him to Samaria. They face opposition and they quickly judge that these people deserve punishment.

    - Jesus uses the opportunity to provide feedback for them and to correct their faulty intention. And then, he demonstrates to them how to deal with the situation: move to the next village!

- **Rooted in prayer as Jesus prayed**
    - **Matthew 9:36-38** – "Pray to the Lord of the harvest…"
    - **John 17**
        - **John 17:1-5**
            - Adoration of the Father and Jesus' gratefulness for the assignment that has been given to him.
            - Good beginning of prayer – focus on God and his Glory.
        - **John 17:6-19**
            - Jesus' attention to those that God has given him out of the world (17:6).
            - Jesus prays for his disciples that they would be kept from the evil one, that they would have joy (all the while he is going to the cross to die!).

- Jesus prays for his disciples' sanctification

    - Sanctified - "to be separated from / set apart"

    - Sanctification for the mission involves the cross!

    - **Sanctification for the purpose of accomplishing the mission for which we are sent into the world!**

- **John 17:20-26**

    - Jesus prays for all those who will believe after the disciples "through their word."

    - **A prayer of true faith and trust!**

- Prayer is where we begin and where we end! The way you pray is going to be the indicator of your commitment to the Great Commission.

- We pray because we display our dependence on God and we recognize our weakness. No self-confidence or a sense of entitlement!

- **The Word of God – Jesus' only authority**

  - Devote time to check on those you are training!

    - Explore questions of character and attitude

    - Affirm their strengths and encourage them

    - Deal with issues of sin and ungodly desires.

"Accountability is an important key to growth. Where it is present, growth inevitably follows."[41]

Joe Aldrich

[41] Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 2006), 112.

- **At all cost avoid becoming authoritarian! There is only one authority – the Word of God displayed in Christ!**

- As you train disciples and minister to them, God will be ministering to you through them!

- **The Principle of Supervision!**

  - Jesus used the on-the-job training to provide feedback for his disciples, to draw their attention to important lessons of life and ministry.

  - Supervision possible because of an ongoing relationship

  - Do you have someone you are accountable to?

  - Who keeps you straight about your practice of spiritual disciplines?

  - Who can speak into your life words of wisdom, can question your words and actions, can challenge you about your character, can hold you responsible for mistakes you make?

"You cannot make disciples without accountability. The modern church knows little about the positives of accountability because it knows little about discipling." [42]

Bill Hull

- Accountability: Crucially important for any Christian and even more so for leaders!
  - Accountability keeps you honest with God and others.
  - Accountability constantly keeps you responsible for your words and actions.
  - Accountability increases your level of commitment to God, to others, and to God's ministry.

Accountability "is to help them keep their commitments to God." [43]

Bill Hull

  - Accountability gives you the opportunity to practice brotherly/sisterly love by carrying each other's burden.
  - Accountability calls you to repentance and ongoing transformation. It also prevents you from keeping in you secret sins and sinful desires.

[42] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 217.
[43] Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 226.

- **Supervision is indispensible for success in disciple-making**

    - Demonstration and delegation are not enough to expect lasting and ongoing results.

    - Disciples need further support and feedback on many expected and unexpected challenges on their life and ministry journey!

    - Without proper supervision many promising leaders are spoiled, potential workers for the kingdom remain underdeveloped, and our whole investment is wasted. It is like a battle lost on the eve of victory!

    - Disciples must be brought to maturity! We have to go all the way to help them achieve the ultimate goal – world conquest!

    - Supervision is the principle that assures all our efforts are worth investing.

"Disciples must be brought to maturity.
There can be no substitute for total victory, and our field is the world.
We have not been called to hold the fort, but to storm the heights."[44]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[44] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 87.

THE PRINCIPLE OF REPRODUCTION
JESUS ANTICIPATED FRUITFULNESS

> ***"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide…"***
>
> ***John 15:16***

- **We must make disciples**
    - Eyes on the harvest
    - Jesus anticipated fruitfulness. He often spoke about fruit.
    - Fruit is the evaluation of a person.

> ***"How sad it is to see a person who spent their whole life on a program but at the end has nothing to show for it in the harvest!"*** [45]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[45] Dr. Robert E. Coleman in class lectures, *Evangelism and Discipleship Course* at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte, Spring, 2009.

- **John 15**

  - The vine and the branches

  - The branches are expected to produce fruit.

  - **The sequence**

    The vine (Jesus) ->>

    ->> The branches (the disciples) ->>

    ->> The fruit (the disciples reproduce)

  - Until you see any fruit, you don't really know what you have accomplished.

- **2 Timothy 2:2**

  Paul ->> Timothy ->> his students ->> their students

  Four generations clearly observed

"Our objective is the evangelization of the world, to be sure. But before much can be done to effectively reach the multitudes, the laboring force in the harvest must be multiplied. Every disciple made for Christ contributes to this ever-expanding working force."[46]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- **An enterprise of faith**
    - Some of the outcomes may remain invisible to us because they will outlive us.
    - We disciple by faith, trusting that God will do his work among people and will multiply the fruit.
- **The Kingdom of God**
    - Reproduction is all about the coming of the kingdom of God.
    - What is the kingdom of God?

[46] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 46.

- The Kingdom is here and it is expanding (Matthew 12:28).

- The Kingdom of God is coming to fruition!

- Do we evaluate our lives in light of eternity?

- Jesus was preaching mainly about the coming of the Kingdom.

- **We do not build the Kingdom**

  - **It is God's kingdom and God builds it.**

  - **We enter the kingdom.**

"The kingdom is best advanced through multiplication and not just addition." [47]

Ed Stetzer

[47] Stetzer, *Planting Missional Churches*, 316.

- **Matthew 24:14**

  - Events as indicators of the end times

  - **This gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the ends of the earth!**

- **Anticipation of the final ingathering**

  - The Eucharist

    - Commemoration of Jesus' death

    - Matthew 26:26-29 (esp. 29) – The anticipation of the time when we will drink and eat with Jesus again.

  - Revelation 7

    - A great multitude that no one can number, from every tongue, every tribe, every people, every nation.

    - What is this picture referring to?

- **The importance of developing a vision for multiplication**
    - The Bible affirms that we are serving God and one another, and that we are priests.
    - The Protestant Reformation: The priesthood of all believers.
        - How do we minister as priests?
        - Making disciples is not a gift of the Spirit, it is a lifestyle!
        - Making disciples is not a special calling, it is a command to every believer!
- **Disciples follow the example of their leader and become like him!**
    - Disciples become like their leader!
    - Develop a vision for multiplication among your people.

- Small beginning is good if reproduction is taking place.

> ***"For as individuals learn of Him***
> ***and follow the pattern of His life,***
> ***they will invariably become disciplers,***
> ***and as their disciples in turn do the same,***
> ***someday through multiplication***
> ***the world will come to know Him***
> ***whom to know aright is life everlasting."***[48]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

- Size and numbers were not driving Jesus' ministry. What mattered was reproduction!

> ***"The key to the final harvest is found***
> ***in the quality and the supply of laborers obeying the mandate of Christ.***
> ***It does not matter how few their numbers are in the beginning,***
> ***provided that they reproduce and teach their disciples in turn to do the same.***
> ***As simple as it may seem, this is the way His Church will ultimately triumph.***
> ***He has no other plan.***
> ***Our Lord did not come in His incarnate body to evangelize the world;***
> ***He came to make it possible for the world to be saved***
> ***through His atoning sacrifice.***
> ***But on his way to Calvary, He made sure that His disciples***
> ***were equipped by strategy and vision to gather the harvest."***[49]
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[48] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 10.
[49] Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 64.

- Beware of sheer numbers and size becoming your driving force and main focus!

> ***"A transformed life multiplies itself and this multiplication is the evidence of transformation."***[50]
>
> ***Edmund Chan***

- **Dream with your disciples about their own role in the harvest**

  - Reflect together about the vision of the kingdom of God and how each one of us can be a vital part of it with our unique gifts, talents, and personality.

  - We invest ourselves in others and later we see the payoff of our work.

  - Remain wise and humble about your role!

- **The Great Commission**

[50] Chan, *A Certain Kind*, 46.

- Make disciples who will make disciples

- **The example of the Early Church**

  - Jesus trained his disciples who invested themselves in others.

  - The Book of Acts: An immediate illustration of the life of the growing church using the same principles from Jesus' ministry.

  - The Early Church is another proof that the plan of Jesus for world conquest works.

"The church that is not multiplying, not reaching people,
not starting new churches, and not involved in missions
is the New Testament anomaly.
Unfortunately we have a lot of anomalies among our churches today." [51]

Thom Rainer & Sam Rainer

[51] Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church? – Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville, TN, B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 155.

- A disrupted plan – loss of focus and commitment due to:
  - Focus on popular recognition
  - Focus on mass recruitment
  - Focus inwardly on the life and ministry of the church

***"Jesus' plan has not been disavowed; it has just been ignored."*[52]**

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- Revival – the vision recovered, the flame reignited

"Multiplication in disciple-making and church planting is the only viable way to see the Great Commission fulfilled. Mere addition will never achieve that."

Stefan Sultanov

[52] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 96.

- **Where do we go from here?**
    - A problem with methodology and principles
    - **The way Jesus did it!**
    - **People are God's method!**

> ***"When will we realize that evangelism is not done by something, but by someone?"[53]***
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

- **Pray for harvesters!**
    - These harvesters are the leaders who will take the responsibility to shepherd the people who live like scattered and hopeless sheep.

> ***"There is no use to pray for the world. What good would it do? God already loves them and has given his Son to save them. No, there is no use to pray vaguely for the world. The world is lost and blind in sin. The only hope for the world is for laborers to go to them with the gospel of salvation, and having won them to the Savior, not to leave them, but to work with them faithfully, patiently, painstakingly, until they become fruitful Christians savoring the world around them with the Redeemer's love."[54]***
>
> ***Dr. Robert E. Coleman***

[53] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 97.
[54] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 94.

- **This is a working day now! We will rest in the next world!**

"This is a working day,
the harvest is coming,
I want to be in it as long as I can
because the day of the Lord is certain.
And in that day
there will be an evaluation.
Our works will be tried as by fire.
And everything that is not for
the glory of God will be burned away.
But there will be something left."[55]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- **The ultimate evaluation**

"The test of any work of evangelism thus
is not what is seen at the moment, or in the conference report,
but in the effectiveness with which the work continues in the next generation.
Similarly the criteria on which a church should measure its success
is not how many new names are added to the role
nor how much the budget is increased,
but rather how many Christians are actively winning souls
and training them to win the multitudes.
The ultimate extent of our witness is what matters,
and for this reason values can be measured only by eternity."[56]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[55] Dr. Robert E. Coleman in class lectures, *Evangelism and Discipleship Course* at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte, Spring, 2009.

[56] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 95.

"It is not enough to rescue the perishing, though this is imperative;
nor is it sufficient to build up newborn babies in the faith in Christ,
although this, too, is necessary if the firstfruit is to endure;
in fact it is not sufficient just to get them out winning souls,
as commendable this work may be.
What really counts in the ultimate perpetuation of our work
is the faithfulness with which our converts go and make leaders
out of their converts, not simply more followers.
Surely we want to win our generation for Christ, and to do it now,
but this is not enough.
Our work is never finished until it has assured its continuation
in the lives of those redeemed by the Evangel."[57]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[57] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 94.

THE PRINCIPLE OF IMPARTATION
JESUS GAVE THEM HIS SPIRIT

"Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:22

- **Last things first – Jesus gave us his Spirit**
    - All principles are meaningless except for the fact that Jesus gives us his Spirit.
    - The Holy Spirit is preparing us and enabling us for this mission of making disciples and reaching out to the lost world with the Good News of salvation.

"We must have his life in us by the Spirit if we are to do his work and practice his teaching. Any evangelistic work without this is as lifeless as it is meaningless."[58]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

[58] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 60.

- **The Holy Spirit at work in the Old Testament**[59]

    - **Creation** - the Holy Spirit moving over the face of the deep.

    - **Adam & Eve**

        - Adam and Eve created in God's image.

        - Restoration of the image only possible by the Spirit! "You have to be born again / from above!" (John 3)

    - The Holy Spirit was mainly with individuals like a king, a priest, a prophet.

    - **"In"?**

        - **No one in the Old Testament is said to have the Spirit *in* him/her.**

        - The usual prepositions used are: "on" or "upon/to."

            - Joseph

            - Moses and the elders (Numbers 11:17, 25-26, 29)

            - Othniel (Judges 3:10)

[59] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants, Vol. 1* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 70-74.

- Jephthah (Judges 11:29)

- Ezekiel (Ezekiel 11:5)

- Balaam (Numbers 24:2)

- Gideon – the Spirit "clothed" him (Judges 6:34)

- "Upon/to" David (1 Samuel 16:13).

- The case of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:2 cf2:3-10ff, 3:24-27)

- **Filled with Spirit**

  - A person being *filled* with the Spirit but the Spirit does not *dwell* in anyone.

  - Usually this *filling* is for a particular task(s) that the Spirit will enable.

    - Micah 3:8

      "But as for me, I am filled with power,
      with the Spirit of the LORD,
      and with justice and might,
      to declare to Jacob his transgression
      and to Israel his sin."

- Exodus 28:3, 31:1-5ff, 35:30-33ff
    - Bezalel and other skilled men filled with God's Spirit for the work on the Tabernacle.
    - Note: skill, ability, knowledge, and wisdom are also included.

- John the Baptist
    - Filled with the Spirit even before his birth. This does not conclude that John always had the Spirit dwelling in him.
    - Filled for the task of baptizing people and "turn the hearts of the parents to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17).
    - Why does Jesus say that the least in the kingdom is greater than John?

- Dwell & Temple
    - Never used of a believer (or anyone for that matter) in the Old Testament.

- **The Holy Spirit at work in the New Testament**
    - It is the Spirit who:
        - Brings you into the Kingdom of God.
        - Sustains you and gives you life.
        - Sanctifies you and begins to impart God's nature in you so that you are being transformed.
        - Distributes the gifts.
        - Works out the fruit in your life – love, joy, peace, ….
        - Raised Jesus from the dead and will raise us from the dead
        - Made the offering without blemish – Jesus at Calvary (Hebrews 9:14). The Holy Spirit is accomplishing God's redemptive purposes.

- The incarnation was by the Spirit. Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit.

- From the very inception of his life, Jesus was without any sin as he was empowered by the Spirit.

- By the Spirit, Jesus was led in his earthly life. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” (Luke 4:16-21, esp. 18, citing Isaiah 61).

- Jesus was able to do his whole ministry by the Spirit.

    - Matthew 12:24

        - What is the unforgivable sin?

    - The Spirit convicts us of our sin.

    - The Spirit breathes in us the desire to turn to God and gives us faith so we can accept the only hope of salvation.

- Ezekiel 36:27

  "And I will put my Spirit *within you,* and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

  - Indicates to the Old Testament people that a time would be coming when God will not only fill, be on, come upon, or cloth individuals for some task but will allow His Spirit to be put in God's people for an *inner work of sanctification and transformation.*

  - Later, Jesus himself will tell his disciples that he will ask the Father to send them another advocate to help them and to be with them forever – the Spirit of truth…. He now lives with them and *will be in* them (John 14:16-17).

"Indeed, the privileges which the disciples were to enjoy in this deeper relationship to the Spirit were greater than they had known as Jesus walked with them along the roads of Galilee." [60]

Robert E. Coleman

  - The Spirit was already with the disciples for the mission tasks they were involved in around Jesus (healing the sick, casting out demons, and proclaiming the Gospel). But now the Spirit will be ***in*** them!

  - The term "temple" is not used for anyone in the Bible before Jesus who describes himself as a temple (John 2:19-21) and had the Spirit without measure (John 3:34)

  - In the New Testament, a believer is a temple of God (1 Corinthians 6:19).

[60] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 58-59.

- Ephesians 5:18 and being filled with the Spirit

"And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery,
but *be filled* with the Spirit…"

  - What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

  - Imperative Present (continuous) Passive: "keep/continue being filled" with the Spirit.

  - In Acts, after Pentecost, there are 10 occasions when an individual or a group are filled with the Holy Spirit:

    - Acts 2:4 – the company waiting in the Upper Room on the day of Pentecost
    - Acts 4:8 – Peter before he spoke to the Sanhedrin
    - Acts 4:31 – a group of early Christians
    - Acts 6:3 – the first deacons
    - Acts 6:5 – Stephen
    - Acts 7:55 – a second reference to Stephen
    - Acts 9:17 – Paul
    - Acts 13:9 – a second reference to Paul
    - Acts 11:24 – Barnabas
    - Acts 13:52 – the disciples at Antioch

    - *In each case, the common factor is the resulting immediate witnessing to Jesus!*

- Paul's instruction about being filled with the Spirit is followed by 5 participles (5:19-21):

    - "*Addressing* (orig. "speaking to one another") one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing* and *making melody* to the Lord with your heart..."

    - "... *giving thanks* always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

    - "... *submitting* to one another out of reverence for Christ."

- **NOTICE:** A Trinitarian nature of the discussion: Christ-followers are to keep being filled with *the Spirit* (5:18), giving thanks to *God the Father* in the name of our *Lord Jesus Christ* (5:20).

- Entrust disciples to the leadership of Jesus

    - Jesus spoke about the Spirit increasingly more as his days on earth were coming to an end. (John 14-16, just before the high-priestly prayer of Jesus).

        - The Father will send another Counselor (John 14:16).

- Acts 2 - Pentecost

"The supernatural work to which they were called demanded supernatural help – an enduement of power from on high."[61]

Dr. Robert E. Coleman

- Do we prepare our people to take responsibility of God's work in our churches? Do we give them a vision for the world?

- We should entrust those we train to the leadership of the Spirit.

- The presence of Christ is the joyous experience of every disciple who fulfills the Great Commission!

  - Jesus will be with the disciples all the way, as they fulfill the Great Commission to the end of time.

  - The presence of Christ is not a reward of heaven or a general promise. It is a special blessing, comfort, assurance for all disciples as they fulfill the Great Commission and make disciples of Jesus.

[61] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 59.

- God's work can only be done in the power of his Spirit
    - We cannot do anything alone.
    - Everything has to be done in the power and demonstration of the Spirit.
    - "You cannot do the work of the Kingdom without the Spirit of the King."[62] Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus

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"You cannot do the work of the Kingdom without the Spirit of the King!"[62]

Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus

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[62] Dr. Jeffrey J. Niehaus in class lectures, *Biblical Theology Course* at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary-Charlotte, Spring, 2012.

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APPENDIX E

SURVEY TWO

The Great Commission: How to Make Disciples of Jesus

Survey 2

October 7, 2023

Stefan Sultanov

My course number _____

1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"… (Mark only one answer that best describes your response):**

   a. I am not sure what it means.

   b. I have a vague idea of what it means.

   c. I am familiar with the idea.

   d. I am well aware of what it means.

2. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel?**

Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Unimportant

3. **This training helped me gain knowledge on the Great Commission.**

A Great Deal	Considerably	To Some Degree	Comparatively Little	Not at all

4. **This training helped me understand the call of Jesus to make disciples.**

A Great Deal	Considerably	To Some Degree	Comparatively Little	Not at all

5. **This training encouraged me to start making disciples of Jesus.**

A Great Deal	Considerably	To Some Degree	Comparatively Little	Not at all

6. **This training helped me learn how to start making disciples of Jesus.**

A Great Deal	Considerably	To Some Degree	Comparatively Little	Not at all

7. **I am planning to initiate disciple-making steps with people in my church.**

A Great Deal	Considerably	To Some Degree	Comparatively Little	Not at all

8. **What was the most valuable part of this training?** ……

……

……

9. **Was there anything missing from this training course you expected to be addressed?**

……

……

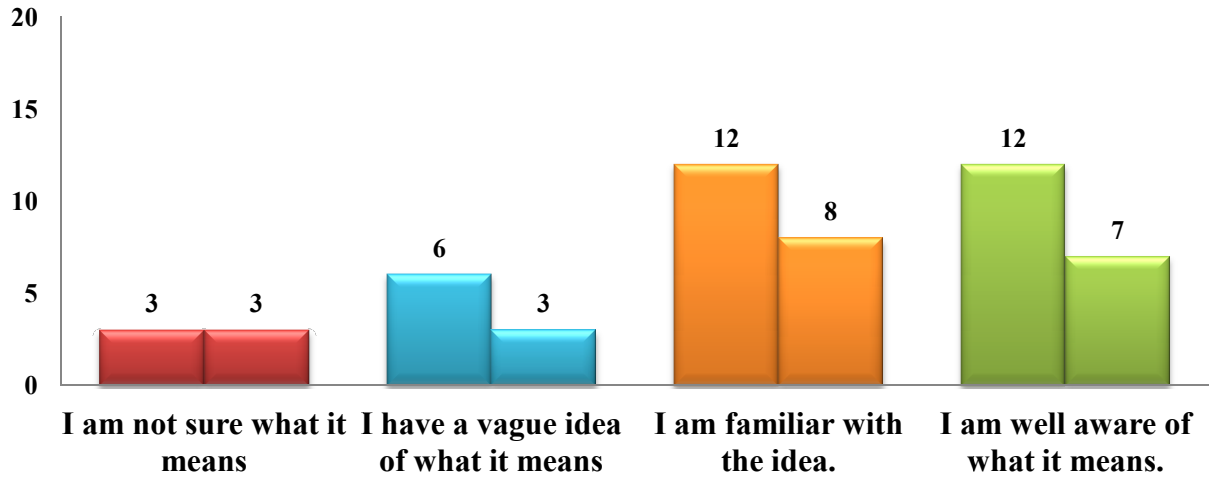
…….....

APPENDIX F

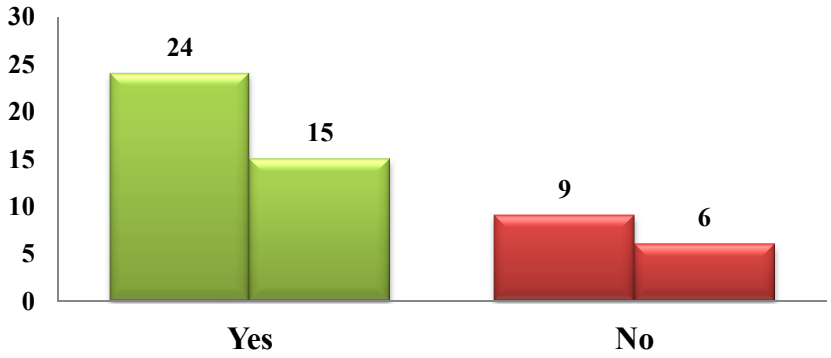
COMPARATIVE RESULTS FROM SURVEY 1 TAKEN BY ALL 33 INITIAL COURSE PARTICIPANTS AND BY THE 21 COURSE GRADUATES

NOTE: The left column for each result represents the responses from the 33 participants while the right column represents the results from the 21 course graduates)

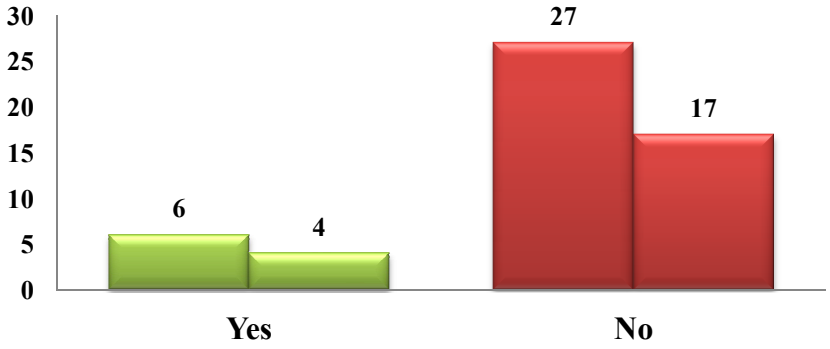
1. **When I hear the word "disciple-making"…**



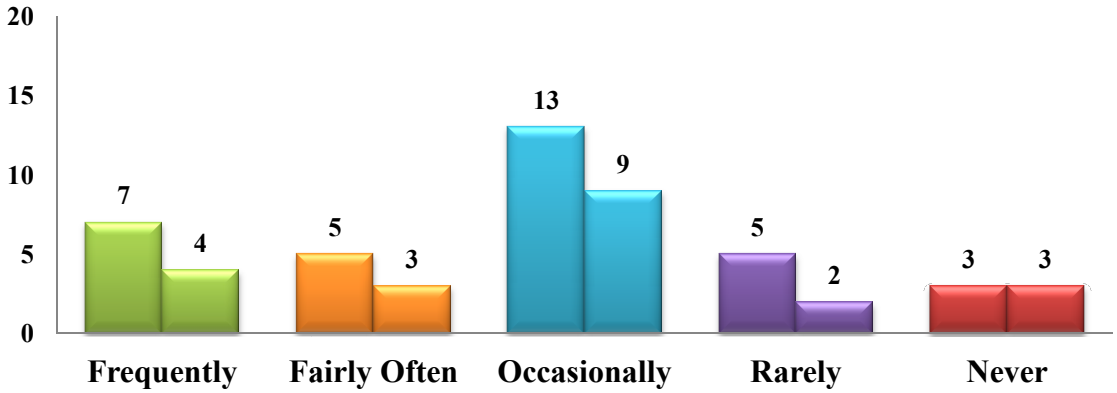
2. **Have you ever been discipled?**



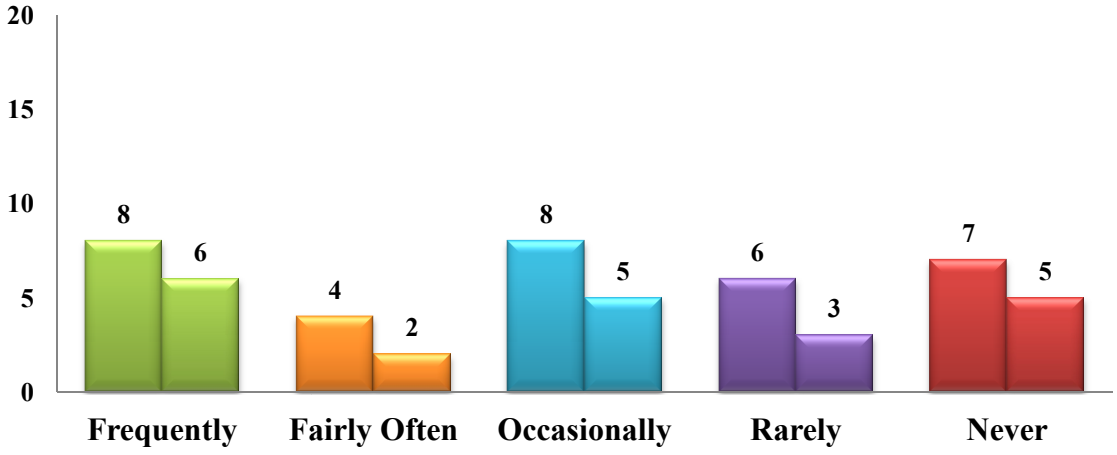
3. **Have you ever participated in any formal training or course on disciple-making?**



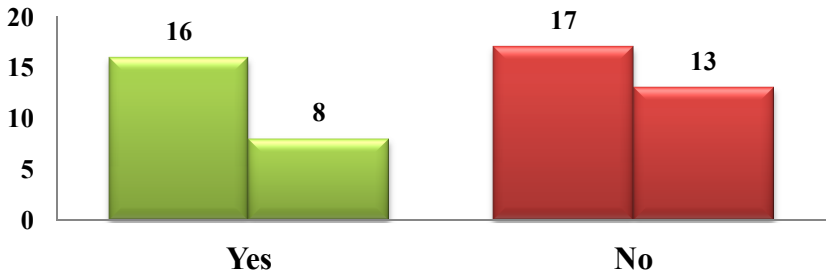
4. **Have you preached or taught on what it means *to be* a disciple of Jesus?**



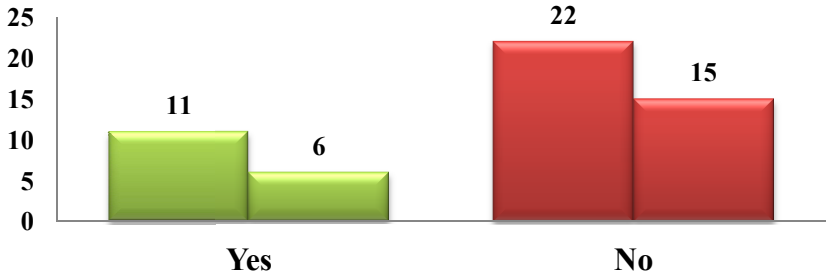
5. **Have you preached or taught on *making disciples* of Jesus?**



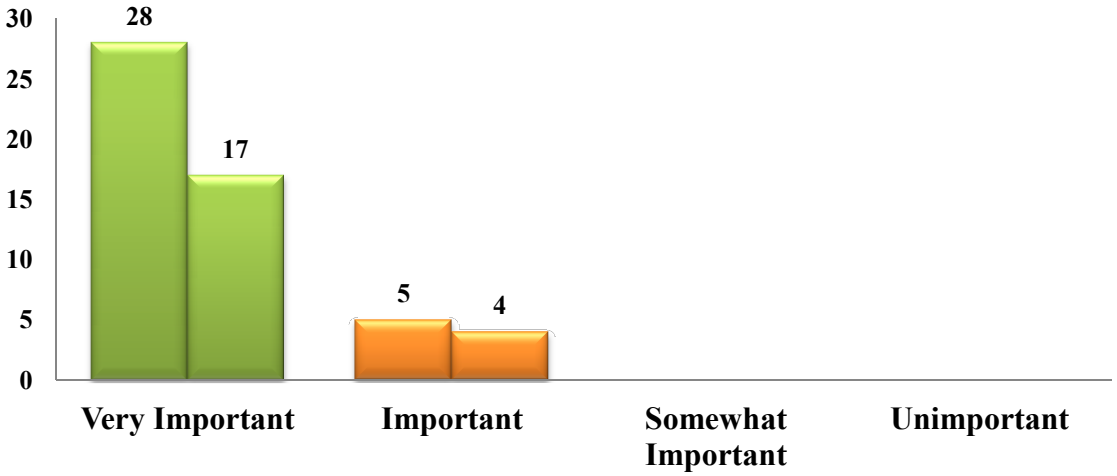
6. **Have you been in disciple-making relationships with people you have trained in the past?**



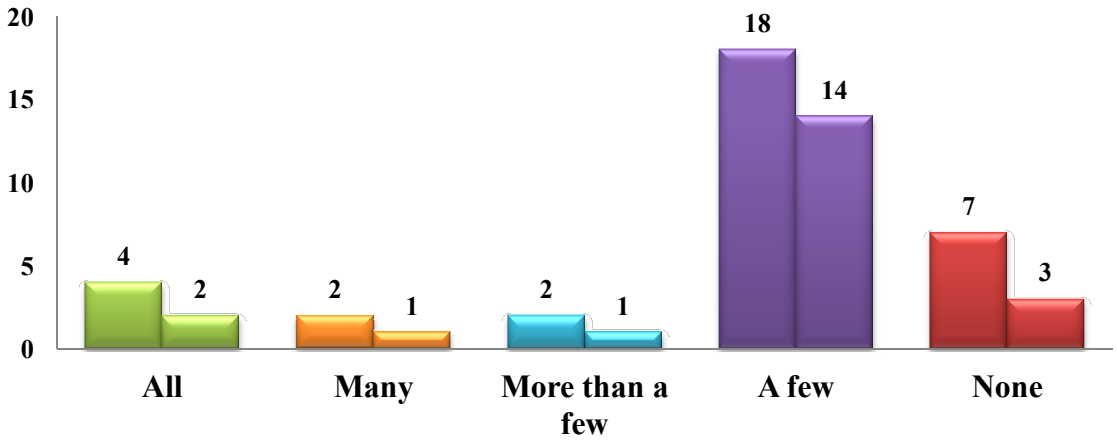
7. **Are you in a disciple-making relationship with someone you are currently training?**



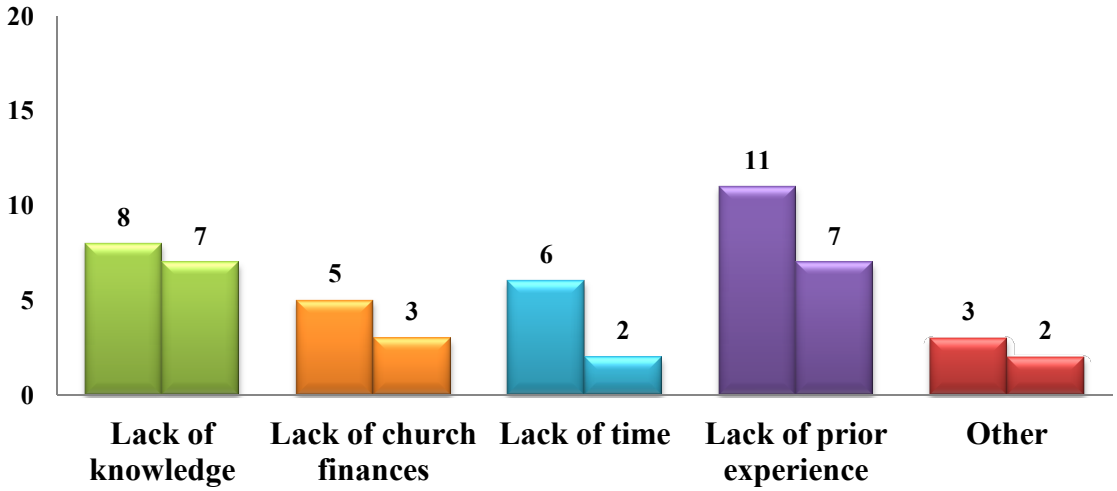
8. **How important is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) to the church and the proclamation of the gospel?**



9. **Of the churches in your area, how many are you aware of that are involved in making disciples of Jesus?**



10. **If you ever wanted to train disciples but you did not, what prevented you from doing it?**



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